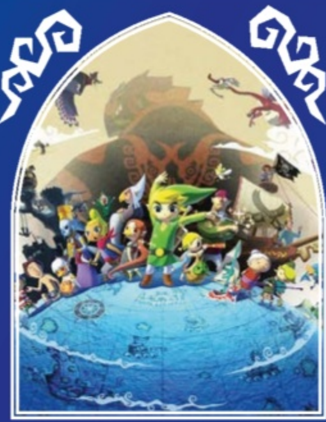
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™



Digital Edition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 121

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

ESSENTIAL ATARI 7800

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the wind maker

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See us at PLAY EXPO

THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE RPG



DARRAN JONES
Eye Of The Beholder. I was a massive *D&D* player growing up and this was the closest available alternative.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



PAUL DRURY
Pokémon Red became an obsession. I was even playing it when my wife was giving birth. Completing *Dragon Quest IX* with the daughter that popped out was special too.
Expertise:
Uncle launching
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



PAUL DAVIES
Final Fantasy VII, it made me sob – seriously.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



JASON KELK
I don't play many RPGs, but *The Bard's Tale III* is probably the closest that I have to an actual favourite.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
IO



IAIN LEE
I did go through a period of being obsessed with *EverQuest*. I was totally addicted and enjoyed winding up the other players.
Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live
Currently Playing:
Halo 4
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC B version)



RICHARD BURTON
Star Wars Galaxies. Immersing yourself in a *Star Wars* world, investing the time to build your character and naively thinking that attaining Jedi status would be a cakewalk was hard but fun.
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Mission Elevator
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

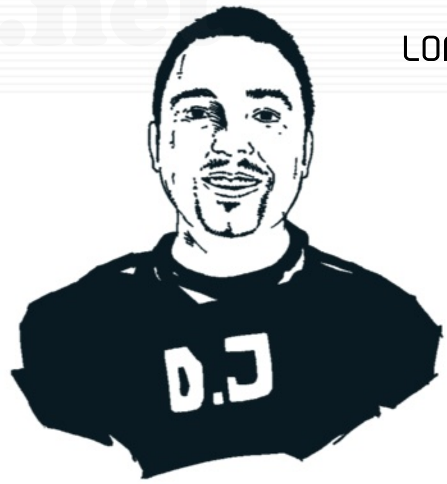


MARTYN CARROLL
It's probably *Final Fantasy Legend III* on the Game Boy. The only RPG that I've actually played through to completion.
Expertise:
Games that blipped and buzzed
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



ANDREW FISHER
Curse Of The Azure Bonds on the Commodore 64. Great story with excellent graphics spread over multiple disks.
Expertise:
30 years of gaming
Currently playing:
Foul Play (Xbox Live)
Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid

LOADING...



This month saw the sad closure of Blitz Games Studios. It makes me unhappy for several reasons, and not just because the Oliver twins are two of the nicest fellows you could hope to meet in the industry.

I'm upset because I've seen a lot of unkind remarks about Blitz Studios' output, suggesting that its no great loss to the industry. This just isn't true. Not in the slightest.

Even if I put aside my love of *Dizzy* and the underrated *Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Horse Rescue*, *Droplitz* and *Glover* (games I'll happily defend until I draw my last breath) it's still easy to see the impact Blitz had on the industry, a legacy that involved a lot of behind-the-scenes contracted work, supporting graduates and games its target audience loved. It's highly telling of the studio's working atmosphere that many staff are currently celebrating Blitz Studios on various public forums, even as they go through the difficult process of finding new jobs.

Formed from the success of *Dizzy*, Blitz Studios survived for 23 years, even bringing *Dizzy* back after negotiations with Codemasters. It appeared that Blitz had created a magic formula that allowed its staff to prosper in a difficult environment, but that formula unravelled on 12 September. I'm going to recover by playing the superb *Droplitz*. I suggest you all do the same.



Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 121 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED





RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…









"An insanely complex control system for its time"

Luke Albigés









retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

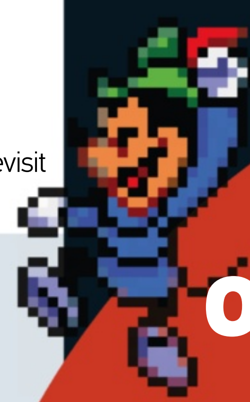




ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED







retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> This month we speak to System 3 about the incoming release of Putty Squad, and mourn the sad passing of Blitz Games Studios and Nintendo's ex-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi

CONTENTS





» There are plenty of levels to explore in *Putty Squad*, with System 3 planning even more via DLC.

RECREATING PUTTY SQUAD



SYSTEM 3'S MARK CALE ON REINVENTING THE CLASSIC 16-BIT PLATFORMER

***Putty Squad* has been a long time coming since it was first announced in 2010.** We were concerned that the game had been indefinitely delayed like the cancelled Amiga version, but it would appear we were wrong. A recent chat with System 3's Mark Cale not only revealed that the game is alive and well, and heading to more formats than ever, but that something very special is planned for the Amiga version that has eluded gamers for so many years. Excited? You should be.

So Mark, what improvements have been added to *Putty Squad* since it's original announcement?

Firstly, we've wanted to take our time to release the best game we could. We realised that *Putty Squad*, originally intended for the Amiga, was a great game, but gameplay has come a long way in the last few years, let alone the last 20. This drove us to really improve every aspect of the game, including core gameplay mechanics. We needed to look at the control scheme (originally one button with directional controls) and make that work, not just on PS Vita, but across PlayStation 3 with it's Sixaxis controller and all other popular game systems.

So there's more content now?

We've added a host of additional modes, such as Challenge mode, a map progression navigation system, downloadable content, the sticker book and so much more. While the game uses the original logic systems of the Amiga version (the original code is still in the game), it's fundamentally a much bigger game. We also allowed Putty to stretch and move onto moving platforms and stretch up and down step-up areas that forced you to jump in the original game. This has given *Putty* a far slicker and smoother feel to the gameplay. We have added in a power-up indicator that shows what your next super punch will be, as well as hidden 'sticker' objects in each level that you collect. All the graphics were reproduced in HD and on some formats created in a 1920 x 1080 screen resolution. New music and sound effects have been added and trophy and progression screens have been added into the game. We have also added in new characters for later levels.

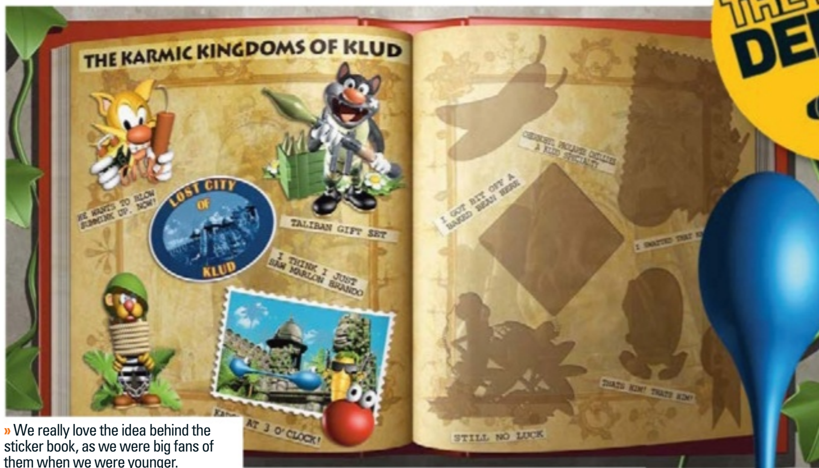
Tell us about the new sticker book idea then.

So, when playing through the game, or in Challenge mode, you'll have different objectives to achieve, with these unlocking stickers. The stickers you unlock directly correlate to our downloadable content. Stickers are also hidden as objects in each level as mentioned above. Collect a full page of stickers and you get a



» *Putty Squad's* visuals have been greatly enhanced, whilst keeping the distinctive crazy look of the original game.

new free level to download to add to the game. The new levels were not in the original game and we have one new level being planned for download every two weeks. While you can pay for the content, and have it from day one, unlocking stickers allows access to the same downloadable content but for free. If you fail to collect all the stickers you can still pay to download the level but naturally it will not be cheap. The idea is to collect the stickers in the sticker book and get the new levels for no charge. We felt this gave the player far more of a reward and feeling of satisfaction if they got a level worth €4.99 for free.



» We really love the idea behind the sticker book, as we were big fans of them when we were younger.

So how many levels can we expect for free?
We will release at least 26 new levels over 52 weeks but plan many more.

Will there be additional paid-for downloadable content?
Yes but play the game and collect the stickers and its free. We will also include new characters from the original *Super Putty* in the new levels of DLC on top of the new levels. On the Sony platforms we will add in avatars. We are also looking to add in new *Putty* characters that you can use as a main hero character in-game. We intend to release DLC every two weeks for at least 12 months post-launch and have over 26 new levels planned to go live. We are also considering offering each level from *Super Putty* to go into the game as an extra bonus as of January next year.

Why has *Putty Squad* taken so long to appear?
I think you will understand that we have not just made the Amiga code work on new formats. That was the route that some of the new retro remakes out there just launching have done. I don't think just emulating Amiga code would have done this game justice. Anyone can take the emulation route like some games have done but crafting a game to work with not just retro gamers but to also engage new younger players and to appeal to both male and female players globally meant we had to really look at all aspects of improving the game. The levels are identical and play in the same way but slicker controls, new graphics and new ways to expand the game were needed to bring it up to date. And well, like any parent, you really don't want to let your children go. Creating games is just like that. Another reason is that we're very proud of our heritage as one of Britain's foremost developers. If we released a game that wasn't up to our high standards we would be letting ourselves down, and more than this, the fans. We owed it to ourselves and every *Putty* fan out there to make the best possible game. I am confident that we have not only achieved this goal but excelled in it.



» Putty Squad's original coder John Twiddy is still involved with the project, which will delight fans of the original.

Is John Twiddy still involved?
John Twiddy is absolutely involved. In fact, he's the lead programmer on every platform we're creating *Putty Squad* for. He knows the game inside-out, and if he wasn't involved, I wouldn't be bringing *Putty Squad* back. John and I work incredibly well together. He is very easy to work with and always executes my vision of what the gameplay should be and how it should feel perfectly. I couldn't be happier that he's the main man leading the coding of the game.

Will there be an option to play the original Amiga version within it?
As much as I'd like to say yes, I can't. Because I can do one better; we're going to release the Amiga version as part of the limited collectors edition. Better than just a download code, it's actually the original and fully complete Amiga version, and it's on 3.5" floppy disk. I can't wait to see people playing this at retro shows across the country, and I'm getting my Amiga out as soon the disks come back from the manufacturer!

***Putty Squad* will be available this November on PS Vita, 3DS, PS3, Xbox 360, Steam, PC, Mac and PS4.**

Remake these next

» More System 3 games that need a Putty Squad makeover

Last Ninja



Yes it's obvious, but how good could a new *Last Ninja* be now? We don't want a 3D action game mind, just make a beautiful isometric adventure and release it on the PS Vita. It nearly came to fruition on PSP, so hopefully System 3 will persuade John Twiddy to return to it.

Myth: History In The Making



The feature on *Myth* in last month's issue has got us all antsy for an update. Again, keep it simple and stick with a 2D adventure. We'd like to see a few more locations though. It has the potential to be really epic, especially with more shooting.

Tusker



System 3 was a master at making epic adventures, and *Tusker* remains a favourite. It's an quest to find the Elephant's Graveyard and would make for a great digital re-release. Again it's ideally suited to handhelds and could look particularly atmospheric on 3DS.

THE RETRO DEBATE

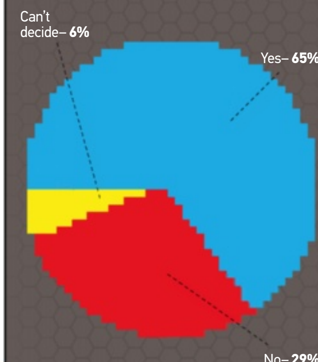
» From the forum: Are you looking forward to Putty Squad?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

"I never played it all those years ago, so I'm certainly going to be buying it for the Vita. It looks like the perfect fit"
Morkin

"Very excited, I played the demo on the Amiga quite a bit. Was very disappointed that it never got released"
IronMaidenRule

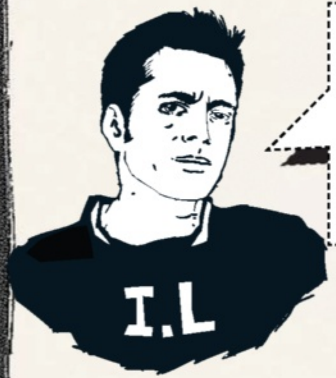
"I played this on the SNES and loved it, quite witty and cleverly made. Was gutted that the Amiga port never saw the light of day, it was perfect on that machine – the demo they produced really showed off what an AGA machine as capable of. I think it's a great idea to have this rebooted for the new generation" **Greyfox**



retro columns

RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

I'm Not The Only One

I recently wrote in these hallowed pages how disappointed I had been when I revisited what was a pivotal game for me, *Pole Position*. Playing it again 25 years later, I couldn't get over how awful it was and struggled to imagine what a teenage me ever saw in it. To be honest, I expected the usual backlash of reactionary nonsense from people criticising me for daring to have an opinion and that I was wrong and that it was a classic and blah, blah, blah. I was therefore quite surprised to receive several emails from people congratulating me on taking such a brave stance (brave, really?), and then letting me know what games they had looked at recently with older eyes only to be left scratching their heads as to why they had spent hours playing them.

Rillo got in touch with an interesting point: "to truly appreciate retro gaming you have to take off the rose-tinted spectacles and appreciate that much of what was on offer was pretty dire." Hmm, strong opinion. Was much of it "pretty dire"? It's quite sweeping… but perhaps it was. I've spoken before about how I once played *Pong* with Al Alcorn in his garage. And while that was one of the coolest moments in my life, and I of course recognise the historical significance of the game, *Pong* is pretty pony. I defy anyone to play it for more than three minutes without looking around to see what else is on offer.

Rob emailed me to say he had recently started digging out some old games on a C64 emulator: "… and [I] was shocked at how quickly each gaming session lasted because I just couldn't derive any pleasure out of the games. They were just so… simple… annoying… repetitive."

In many ways, the simplicity is what appeals to me. I do think some games are far too complicated and confusing these days. And I don't mind a bit of repetition. I love *Pac-Man* and that ticks both of these boxes. But the annoyance factor… well, he does have something. Rob suggests that perhaps it was the newness of videogames that made them so appealing. And with televisions that can connect to the internet and do all kinds of trickery, it's hard to imagine just how exciting it was to control something on a TV screen.

I also heard from Vinny who told me he had just bought three BBC computers (I have no idea either…) and that, while he hated *Pole Position* on it, he loved *Hopper*, a *Frogger* clone I could never stomach. So I guess it's horses for courses.

I'll leave the final word to Rob. He puts forward a few reasons why we loved games that perhaps weren't very good, but his most simple suggestion is probably the best.

"Or maybe it's just, as a kid, things are more fun. I would throw a ball against a wall for hours on end. That'd do me. A single tennis ball. Or a pencil and paper. There's a bunch of hours gone; just me, paper, pencil and imagination."

Works for me.

» EVERYTHING THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN THE WORLD OF RETRO THIS MONTH

SHELL-SHOCKED



BLITZ GAMES STUDIOS CLOSES AFTER 23 YEARS

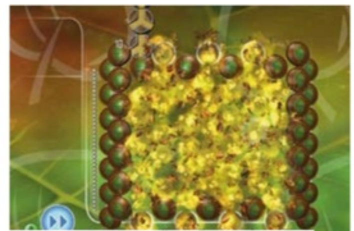
As Retro Gamer was preparing to go to print, the shock news arrived that Blitz Games Studios, the Leamington Spa-based developer created by Philip and Andrew Oliver in 1990, was to close its doors. In a statement on the Blitz Games Studios website it was revealed that, despite the many efforts from management to secure the future of the company, only two projects could be self-sustained financially, and these would be serviced with a new company, saving approximately 50 of the likely 175 job losses.

"We have managed to weather numerous storms over the last two decades," said co-founder and CEO Philip Oliver, "…but the run of problems we've had to face over the last year is unlike any we've seen before." Citing issues such as the global economic crisis, a reluctance from major clients to commit investment and simple bad luck, Philip felt they were left with little choice. "We have done all we can to make Blitz a success and we have come frustratingly close in recent months," he continued, "and all of these things have continued to hurt our finances." It is likely the demise of publisher and Blitz client THQ in 2012 was a factor, along with the competitive mobile phone games market.


» [GameCube] *Pac-Man World 3* was a fun romp and typical of Blitz's output.

> "We have done all we can to make Blitz a success"
> Philip Oliver

Blitz Games Studios, originally named Interactive Studios, was formed in 1990 after the twins had cut their teeth with a type-in for *Computer And Video Games* magazine for which they received £50. Inspired accordingly, they began programming, most notably for popular budget software publisher Codemasters. Buoyed by the success of their most fondly remembered game, *Dizzy*, Andrew and Philip created their own development company and were initially involved in licensed properties such as the *Judge Dredd* movie tie-in on the Master System and Game Boy. Soon they began to develop original properties such as *Firo And Klawd* and *Glover* on the Sony PlayStation, although in recent times Blitz had relied heavily on licensed properties, games which are now far less fashionable.


» [Xbox 360] *Droplitz* is a superb puzzle game that everyone should experience.

With the Blitz management in close contact with fellow developers, there are hopes that many of the Blitz staff will find jobs elsewhere in the industry. Yet despite the closure, Philip Oliver maintains an optimistic outlook of the games industry; it's unlikely we've heard the last of the Oliver Twins.

RETRO GAMER COASTERS OUT NOW



Fans of Retro Gamer will love our excellent coasters. Available in packs of four, they feature some of our best covers from the past 100 issues and are the perfect accompaniment to our excellent **Retro Gamer** mugs. Featuring high quality prints and a strong cork backing, they're coated with a lovely gloss finish, making them extremely durable. A pack of four costs just £4.99, so order a set from **www.imagineshop.co.uk**

THE BEAST IS BACK



Classic side-scrolling action-adventure *Shadow Of The Beast* is set to return in 2014. Originally released on the Commodore Amiga way back in 1989, developer Heavy Spectrum Entertainment Labs is busy rebooting the game for Sony's PlayStation network in order to celebrate the franchise's 25th anniversary. Little is being revealed at this stage, but fans can expect not only updated graphics and sound, but also new modes such as survival (where tougher and tougher enemies are thrown at the player) and, of course, multiplayer.

MOST EXCITED ABOUT



CRIMSON DRAGON

The spiritual successor to *Panzer Dragoon* is nearly here. Thank goodness it no longer relies on just Kinect controls to power it.

SCRUMPING ON iOS

JIM BAGLEY RESURRECTS MISSING PLATFORMER

Many of you will recognise the name Jim Bagley. After coding games such as *Midnight Resistance* and *Cabal* on the Sinclair Spectrum, the ace programmer moved to Master System and Mega Drive development in the early Nineties. And now he's back with a new game from old roots. "After finishing *Striker* for the Mega Drive I designed and wrote a platform game in my spare time," reveals Jim, "although with my limited artistic skills, I used placeholder graphics from *Striker*. I wanted to do a platformer that had collectables, bonuses and a tally screen after each level." Jim based his game on a fruit-collecting theme and had soon constructed 80 levels. "But experience had taught me to keep my own games to myself as the company I was working for was busy on football games. And it wasn't graphically acceptable so it was only recently that I decided to resurrect it." Along with colleague Paul Vera-Broadbent (who Jim coincidentally worked with on the Master System version of *Striker*), they decided the idea had potential on today's mobile platforms.

"We gave the game a major overhaul, but wanted to keep the original mechanics of the player, power-ups and fruit collecting, but redesigning the levels to cater for touch-screen technology, " says Jim. The result is *Apple Dash*, a platformer that tasks its hero with taking on the evil, erm, Evil PLC and rescuing bees from the clutches of the villainous Gloopers. Bees? "Originally the baddies were bees," explains Jim, "but as bees are a very important part of fruit, plus with the current problems with hives being wiped out by pesticides we decided to give the game a new angle. Now you have to work your way through four worlds and 100 levels to rescue the queen bee!" Along with special flower power-ups, magic hats and inventive level design, *Apple Dash* looks set to bring back memories of arcade games such as *Bubble Bobble* and *Mr Do!* and should be available in the AppStore by the time this issue goes to print.



A LEGEND PASSES

NINTENDO LOSES HIROSHI YAMAUCHI 1927-2013

Right as we were going to print, word reached us that Nintendo's ex-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi had passed away. Yamauchi first joined Nintendo in 1949 when it was still best known for creating Hanafuda playing cards.

While he created a successful partnership with Disney, by featuring its art on Nintendo's art, he eventually started diversifying Nintendo, selling everything from toys to love hotels, before steering Nintendo towards the videogame market.

Nintendo grew under Yamauchi's leadership and he oversaw the releases of some of the company's most import products, from the NES and SNES to the Game Boy and N64, before stepping down in 2002.

We'll have a more fitting tribute to this gaming legend next month.



» Hiroshi Yamauchi was the driving force behind Nintendo's early success in the videogame industry.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

You've Had Your Chips

Now that even Nintendo is hawking its latest games via digital download, I have been shocked into realising that all game cartridges – even *Atari Karts* and *Family Dog* – are now precious time capsules. Guard them with your life!

It used to be so terrifying. When new games arrived at *Mean Machines* for review, they often came in small cardboard boxes containing as many as six ROMS nestled in a tiny piece of soot-grey sponge. The reviewer would take responsibility for these ROMS, including the nerve-wracking task of slotting them onto a PCB designed for SNES or Mega Drive. You really did not want to be that guy who bent or, worse, snapped the 'legs' on ROMS freshly minted with the latest masterpiece from Konami.

Your heart stopped if a priceless ROM were accidentally flicked skyward in sickening slow motion by a pair of scissors. Due to this, the relationship that reviewers had with games in the Nineties could feel like life or death (depending on your boss). And for consumers too, waiting for a package to arrive from mail order that held a sweet-smelling box, within it a weighty solid-state incarceration of the action you'd set your heart on encased in an iconic plastic shell with a shiny sticker shouting its name.

This ownership conversation has been bouncing around my brain for a while, and I thought it was going to be about instruction books and pretty boxes. It isn't and never was, I now realise. It was about the chips. The pointy-edged plastic and metal that comprised my most prized possessions, a place where *Rocket Knight Adventures* existed so that I could hold it in my hand, special because the one-off *Mean Machines* sample has an alternate intro animation to the one released.

Nowadays, in case you're wondering how it works, writers often receive codes emailed from the publishers and their PR teams. It used to be plain CDs/DVDs/BDs, which was kind of interesting, but anyway an email was how I came into possession of SNES classic *Earthbound* for Wii U. When I first owned (imported) *Earthbound* for my SNES, it came in a box the size of a cereal packet together with a scratch-and-sniff guidebook from *Nintendo Power*. It was a royal procession arriving in a jiffy bag, but now more akin to the tomb of Tutankhamun.

Weirdly, the obsession is now with the chips inside the consoles themselves! The prospect of having nothing physical left to own in terms of gaming software is driving many of us to stare at photos of the Xbox One system on a chip or diagrams of unified memory for PlayStation 4. What's under the hood? What are we actually getting for the money, and how does this measure up?

We didn't used to care at all about what a SNES or Mega Drive looked like without their distinctive cartridge slots and reset buttons. We were satisfied knowing the performance difference between Blast Processing for speedy hedgehogs and Mode 7 for swirly-whirly flight-sims and racetracks.

Now that banana-yellow *Donkey Kong* cartridges are off the menu, I've got to be honest, I'll probably end up sniffing the consoles more than I used to. I'll spend time polishing the outer cases and admiring their little lights and badges, pretending that a cloud isn't coming…

10 October – 07 November

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



12 October 2013
■ The latest wave of *Pokémon* games is due for release on this day with the arrival of *Pokémon X* and *Y* on Nintendo 3DS.



13 October 1995
■ For Mega Drive games on the move, why not try Sega's Nomad handheld console? Released exclusively in the USA on this day.



14 October 1983
■ *Chuckie Egg*, one of the greatest platform games of all time, is released on the ZX Spectrum.

14 October 1985
■ Mastertronic unveils its sub-label, MAD, which is a smidge more expensive than usual.





17 October 1983
■ The Atari 2800 is released exclusively in Japan. It was a 2600 in sleeker casing with different controllers and more ports to stick them in.



16 October 1995
■ The Casio Loopy console is released exclusively in Japan. As such, it is never heard of again.



15 October 1992
■ Sega's controversial Mega-CD game *Night Trap* makes its debut in the US.



14 October 1999
■ Get your fingers stinking of virtual fishiness with a game of *Sega Bass Fishing* on the Dreamcast.



17 October 1985
■ Newsfield Publications publishes the first issue of *Amtix!*, the Amstrad equivalent of *Crash* and *Zzap!64*.



18 October 2013
■ Sonic the Hedgehog's latest adventure, *Sonic Lost World*, is due out for Nintendo Wii U and the 3DS.



21 October 1983
■ After the success of the ColecoVision, Coleco enters the home computing world with its Coleco Adam computer. It didn't do too well…



25 October 2006
■ Rockstar Games's controversial open-world action-adventure game *Bully*, aka *Canis Canem Edit*, is released in the UK on PlayStation 2.



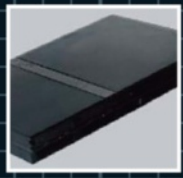
5 November 1976
■ *F-1*, a racing arcade game, was the first and last time Atari dipped its toe into projection games.



31 October 2003
■ *Mega Man Zero 2* is released on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. It's more of the same but with the difficulty levels ramped up.



30 October 1987
■ The TurboGrafx-16 console, developed by Hudson Soft and NEC, makes its worldwide bow in Japan.



29 October 2004
■ The first major redesign of the PS2, the waif-like PS2 Slim, is released across Europe. Strangely, Europe gets it before anywhere else for a change…



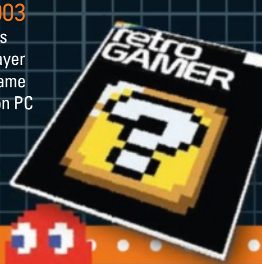
5 November 2004
■ *Bejeweled 2 Deluxe*, the sequel to the ridiculously successful puzzle game, is released on PC.



6 November 1979
■ Atari releases a vector graphics arcade coin-op game by the name of *Asteroids*. It does rather well.



7 November 2003
■ LucasArts releases its massively multiplayer online role-playing game *Star Wars Galaxies* on PC in Europe.



7 November 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

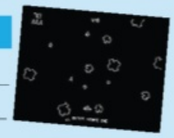


» [Arcade] The cocktail and upright cabinets of *Warlords* were very different beasts, with colour and four-player options on the cocktail version.

CHARTS

APRIL 1980

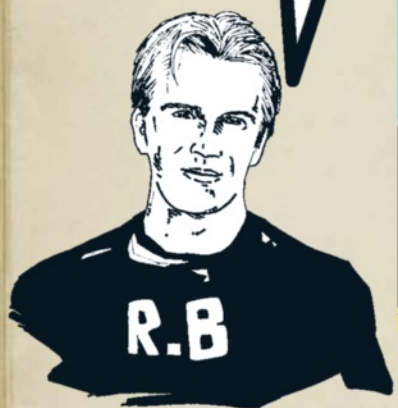
ARCADE	
1	Asteroids (Atari)
2	Galaxian (Midway)
3	Monaco GP (Atari)
4	Space Invaders Part II (Midway)
5	Lunar Lander (Atari)



» [Game & Watch] *Ball* was the first game in Nintendo's Game & Watch series. Just another 59 games to go…



APRIL 1980 – Warlords arrives, Atari goes to Monte Carlo, Taito is pumped by its Crazy Balloon release, Rip-Off gets ripped off, Moon Raker appears and it's time for Game & Watch. Richard Burton drops his Ball…



THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1980

Atari released its first soccer arcade coin-op game with the appropriately titled *Atari Soccer*. It was for two or four players and was exclusively released in the cocktail cabinet format. The game was viewed with a top-down perspective of the pitch, with Atari strangely opting to use monochrome graphics throughout. At least it put more thought into the controllers, as it was one of the first arcade games to use a trackball.

Despite the novel four-player mode and the competitiveness that it brought, *Atari Soccer* failed to ignite the general public's interest, even though the game itself was reasonably good fun to play. It disappeared from arcades rather swiftly as a result.



» [Arcade] *Space Invaders* under the sea – essentially that's *Tomahawk 777* in a nutshell. Wasn't much cop either…

Atari implemented yet more black and white graphics with another arcade release, the upright cabinet version of *Warlords*. This was a two-player only version which again employed colourless graphics, although a coloured overlay was stuck to the screen combined with a mirrored 3D play field to add depth. It kind of worked.

However, wrongs were well and truly righted with Atari's cocktail cabinet release of *Warlords*, which had full colour graphics and a terrific simultaneous four-player option as well.

Essentially *Warlords* was a fancy-pants version of *Breakout*. With four coloured forts at each corner and a flaming fireball bouncing around the screen, the aim was to knock down your opponent's fort and hit the emblem at its centre. It was good, solid gaming fun and remains an absolute blast in four-player mode.

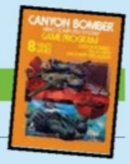
Completing a trio of Atari coin-op releases this month was *Monte Carlo*. You got to choose from eight different tracks and race your grand prix-style car against four computer-controlled opponents while avoiding skidding or crashing off.

Although not the most testing of games, it had a realistic steering wheel controller and gear stick and some excellent sound effects such as tyre screeches and engine revving.

Warlords and *Monte Carlo* were both designed and programmed by Norm Avellar, his first two projects for Atari. He later helped with the development of several arcade games, including *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Vindicators*.

There was no let-up in arcade releases as Taito's latest coin-op offering arrived, the imaginative and original *Crazy Balloon*. You had to manoeuvre your lightly swaying balloon through a dastardly and very spiky maze towards the goal within a set time limit. If you dawdled too much a face would appear and attempt to blow you onto the spikes. Also, as you progressed, you would find that some spikes – or even the entire maze – would become mobile, making negotiating the maze incredibly taxing.

It was a quirky release but not something really suited to arcade gameplay. No officially licensed versions were ever forthcoming on home computers, although a handful of clones were available; the most


TANDY TRS-80	ATARI 2600	MUSIC
1 Datestones Of Ryn (Automated Simulations)	**1** Canyon Bomber (Atari)	**1** Working My Way Back To You (Detroit Spinners)
2 Adventure (Microsoft)	**2** Sky Diver (Atari)	**2** Call Me (Blondie)
3 Star Trek (Adventure International)	**3** Championship Soccer (Atari)	**3** Geno (Dexy's Midnight Runners)
4 Temple Of Apshai (Automated Simulations)	**4** Superman (Atari)	**4** Liquid Gold (Dance Yourself Dizzy)
5 Android Nim (SoftSide)	**5** Slot Machines (Atari)	**5** King/Food For Thought (UB40)

notable of which was Software Project's Commodore 64 rendition of the game subtly called *Crazy Balloon*.

Rip-Off was a vector graphics shoot-'-em-up in the top-down style devised by Cinematronics. It was also the first example of an arcade game in which co-operative gameplay featured. The aim of the game was to protect a collection of fuel cells situated in the centre of the screen. These cells come under constant attack by opposition tanks that try to drag them away. Your task, along with your gaming compatriot, was to keep the enemy hordes at bay with your combined firepower and teamwork.

Destroy all the tanks and you progressed to a slightly faster, harder stage against more skilful and better tooled-up opponents. The game ends when all the fuel cells have been removed (or ripped off) from the central area.

Despite some ingenious gaming elements and crisply defined vector graphics, *Rip-Off* barely garnered any interest from gamers. A shame, as it was an innovative and very playable coin-op. It remained unconverted to any other home games systems until 1983 when a Vectrex conversion arrived, a game that couldn't have been better suited to a console.

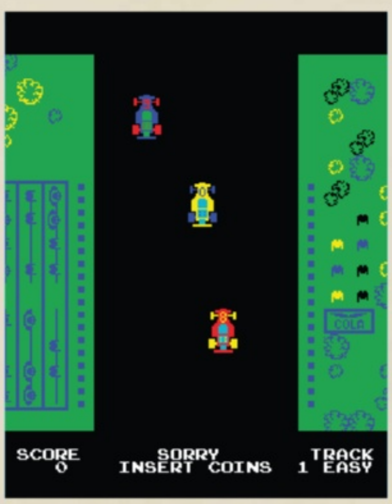
Data East also had a coin-op ready for release, the powerful-sounding *Tomahawk 777*. Although the subject matter potentially lends itself to all sorts of blasting goodness, *Tomahawk 777* was little more than a water-based vertical shooter in a similar style to *Space Invaders*, except you controlled a submarine, shooting your torpedoes skyward to the awaiting aliens.

Nichibutsu had the final coin-op word for April with its release of *Moon Raker*, a fixed vertical shooter. Regrettably, it had no connection to James Bond, being merely a bog-standard *Space Invaders* clone offering nothing new in the way of gameplay or variation.

Nintendo proudly released its first game in what would become a lucrative and critically acclaimed series, the Game & Watch collection. They were games that could be played on the move and were small enough to be put in your pocket, all with the convenience of a clock on screen. There were two levels of gameplay, with a Game B that was usually a smidge faster than that of Game A.

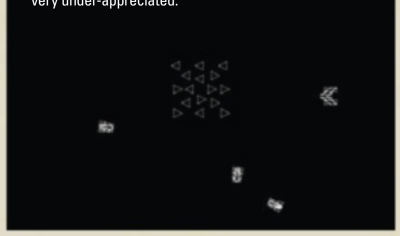
The first title in the pocket gaming series was *Ball*, which was officially released on 28 April. The object of *Ball* was to throw three balls in the air and continuously keep them aloft, much like juggling. Drop a ball and lose a life. Drop three balls and it's game over.

Ball and its character Mr Game & Watch have appeared in many Nintendo games, including Game & Watch collections on various Game Boy handhelds and the *Super Smash Bros Melee* and *Brawl* games. You can still obtain a reproduction of the original handheld game through Nintendo's own Club Nintendo Star Points collecting scheme, should you yearn for a bit of *Ball* action without the hefty expenditure that would come with buying the original Game & Watch version.



» [Arcade] *Monte Carlo* was an early racing game from Atari. It had good sound and controls, but offered little challenge.

» [Arcade] *Rip-Off* was innovative despite being graphically sparse. It was all gameplay and very under-appreciated.



APRIL WORLD NEWS



4 April saw the final episode of *Hawaii Five-O* starring Jack Lord as Detective Lieutenant Steve McGarrett. It ran for 279 episodes spanning 12 series, with the first starting in September 1968.

14 April saw the first album release from the British heavy metal band *Iron Maiden*. The self-titled album entered the charts at number four with memorable tracks such as *Sanctuary*, *Running Free* and *Iron Maiden*.

29 April marked the death of Alfred Hitchcock, who is often considered to be Britain's greatest filmmaker. He was renowned for making cameo appearances in many of his movies such as *The Birds*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho*. He died of renal failure at the age of 80.

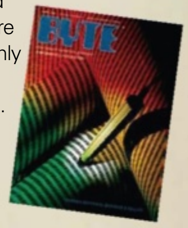
30 April saw the first day of a six-day siege of the Iranian Embassy in South Kensington, London. 26 people were taken hostage by a group of six armed gunmen demanding the release of Arab political prisoners plus safe passage out of the UK. Day six saw the terrorists become increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress and they informed the police that they would execute a hostage, which they duly did.

This forced the British government's hand and the SAS were told to prepare an assault plan. The end of the raid was broadcast live on television showing the now infamous scene of an explosion on the balcony window as the SAS entered the embassy. Of the six gunmen, all but one was killed, with two further hostages dying in the assault.

THIS MONTH IN...

BYTE

Coming soon was *Rogue*, a cross-platform dungeon crawler game by Michael Toy and Glenn Wichman as AI Design. Influenced by *Colossal Cave Adventure*, it had the unique feature of having randomly generated dungeon layouts. It quickly became a college network favourite.



COMPUTER AGE

Among the suitcase-sized portable computers and the adverts for eight inch floppy disks was an advert for the new home computer from Science Of Cambridge (pre-Sinclair Research name change), the ZX80. It was available for only £79.99 in kit form or £99.99 already built.



COMPUTE

Compute looked at the Atari 400/800 game *Star Raiders* and its programmer Doug Neubauer. Despite designing the game, he didn't receive any royalties from its huge success. However, he stated that he never thought of *Star Raiders* in money terms and would've almost done it for nothing. Atari epic win.





» [Arcade] *Crazy Balloon* had you guiding a balloon through a spiky maze. A quirky arcade offering that was fun and original.

BACK TO THE NINETIES





» [PlayStation] Sony's mascot arrives with this fun 2D platform game broken up with nice 3D sections.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1996

AUGUST 1996 – Crash Bandicoot arrives, Project Overkill shoots in, Aquanaut's Journey has clams and calms, Saturn Bomberman blasts off while sequels develop and disappear. Richard Burton has high hopes for a Chuckie Egg 3…

There was a new anthropomorphic character trying to tempt you to buy their platform game on the PlayStation this month, a Bandicoot named Crash.

Crash is the result of two evil doctors hell-bent on world domination by means of devices they've invented that turn cutesy animals into deranged monsters, frying their brains in the process. Crash was lucky, his brain stayed intact and, with the knowledge his creators are evil-doers, sets about righting wrongs and rescuing loved ones by fighting his way through three islands of freshly created monster mayhem.

Reaction to *Crash Bandicoot* was generally positive, with lovely backdrops and slick animations combining with nice level design and graphics. It was criticised for being just a bit too old-school in its formulaic approach to platform gaming however. It was primarily a 2D platform game with 3D elements but worked well despite feeling like a mish-mash of other platformers of the time.

Despite this, *Crash* was still tremendously playable and deserved the attention it received, going on to become one of the PlayStation's best selling games. Naturally, it wasn't long before Sony had development plans in place for several sequels, which would all be exclusive to the system. Developer Naughty Dog came to the attention of gamers and Crash was elevated to mascot status for Sony in a similar way to how Sonic had for Sega.

If fluffy animal-based platform games left you cold, then Konami's newest PlayStation release would probably leave you more satisfied. *Project Overkill* was a shoot-'em-up played in an isometric view. The premise was standard fare; shoot stuff, work your way through the levels, shoot more stuff and complete the required objective. This could be finding an object, shooting a specific character or simply getting to the end of the level with a high enough percentage of kills.

A nice touch was that you got to play four different characters rather than just one character with four lives. Each mercenary you played had slightly different characteristics to the others, giving the game a surprising amount of depth and longevity. It's a pity, then, that the controls weren't the easiest to master…

Despite the odd control issues, *Project Overkill* was a fun little blaster with plenty of blood, violence and exploding heads to keep your inner goremonger happy for several weeks. Although a proposed Sega Saturn version was under development it was sadly cancelled; something that would happen to many other PlayStation to Saturn ports.

A game that was almost the polar opposite of *Project Overkill* was *Aquanaut's Holiday.* Labelled as an ocean exploring experience, it was more an exercise in stress relief than an actual game. It had no real objective other than creating a coral reef to



» [Sega Saturn] *Rayman* was great entertainment on the Saturn. *Rayman 2* would arrive on Dreamcast years later.

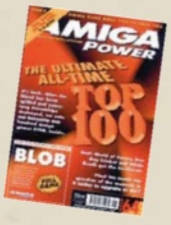


» [PlayStation] *Aquanaut's Holiday* was certainly a different game, with no scores, no objectives and no pressures.

THIS MONTH IN…

AMIGA POWER

It was time again for the annual *Amiga Power* top 100 Amiga games list. The top three titles for the system, in reverse order, were; *Guardian* (Acid Software), *Gravity Power* (Bits Productions) and top of the pile for a fourth year running was *Sensible World Of Soccer* (Sensible Software).



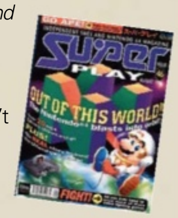
OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE

With the Olympics coming to an end there had been an influx of button-mashing sports games. News that US Gold had won the Olympics licence was greeted with a fair amount of trepidation as thoughts turned back to the great jobs they did with the official World Cup games…



SUPER PLAY

Super Play had something of a rarity among its pages this month – two previews of games for Nintendo's Virtual Boy console. *Dragon Hopper* and *Bound High* both looked suitably red in colour and dull as ditch water. Predictably, both of the games weren't ever released as the Virtual Boy had been discontinued in March…



AUGUST WORLD NEWS

6 August saw an article in *Science* magazine by David MacKay of NASA that ALH 84001, an 8 billion-year-old meteorite thought to have originated from Mars, may have contained extra-terrestrial life. The chain-like structures were thought to be fossilised bacteria measuring a minuscule 20 nanometres in diameter. This was interpretation rather than fact, although the announcement spread like wildfire.

6 August 1996 was also the day punk rock band The Ramones played their final show at the Palace in Hollywood. Just over eight years later the three founding members of the band, Joey Ramone, Johnny Ramone and Dee Dee Ramone had all died.

9 August saw more alien life with the sci-fi action adventure movie *Independence Day* released in UK cinemas. It saw Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum taking on an alien invasion of gigantic proportions with a mothership full of a violent alien species to defeat.

9 August also saw the world premiere of *Escape From LA* starring Kurt Russell as the eye-patched anti-hero Snake Plissken who has to enter Los Angeles, now a dumping ground for all types of undesirable people, to find a possible doomsday device.



24 August saw former Microsoft employees Gabe Newell and Mike Harrington form their new company, Valve Corporation. As well as being the developers behind future major franchises such as *Half-Life* and *Portal*, Valve Corporation also formed Steam, a digital distribution service allowing users to download games from its software library.



» [PlayStation] *Project Overkill* was a frenzy of death, destruction, shooting and bloody massacres. Lovely.

attract new marine life. You spent your time wandering the huge play area, occasionally finding ruins and treasure but mostly just interacting with sea life. There were no time limits, no scoring system and no puzzles to solve. You simply explored, relaxed and mooched around the bottom of the sea, all in a first-person perspective.

Understandably it wasn't to everyone's tastes. There was surprise that it even received a European release given that it hadn't performed well sales-wise in Japan, the home of weird and wonderful gaming.

That said, *Aquanaut's Journey* does hold your interest, and the novelty of having no targets or pressures put upon you does make for a relaxing piece of entertainment. Consider it a gentle fishy massage for your videogame-soaked grey matter. It would go on to receive several sequels, with the most recent being available on PS3.

Coming soon to the Sega Saturn was *Saturn Bomberman* by Hudson Soft. Any new version of *Bomberman* is always good news, but for Saturn owners they would have the added benefit of a quite mind-blowing simultaneous ten-player battle mode, albeit with the aid of two multi-taps and a mountain of controllers.

Slightly more disappointing for gamers was the lack of online support for the European edition of the game. Both Japanese and American versions would feature this most welcome addition, but Sega short-changed the European and UK gamers by not bothering to produce a Saturn modem and the joys of online gaming that would bring. Even with this oversight, *Saturn Bomberman* still became a must-have game for the system.

The Sega Mega Drive was about to be graced with the follow-up to Brøderbund Software's hugely successful *Prince Of Persia* platform sword-'em-up game of 1989.

Prince Of Persia 2: The Shadow And The Flame saw you about to claim the hand of the Sultan's daughter after defeating the evil Jaffar. Unfortunately, he's returned, turned you into a pauper and had you banished from the Sultan's palace. You must now find a way of defeating Jaffar once again.

Prince Of Persia 2 had already been available on SNES and PC for three years, so hopes were high that the long wait would be worth it. Psygnosis was on converting duties and had all but finished the game when it was cancelled, presumably because the perceived end of the Mega Drive's commercial life was not far away. Thankfully, in August 2006 the almost-finished final version was leaked into the public domain.

It was a similar story for another sequel, the Saturn version of *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* by Ubisoft. The original *Rayman* had garnered some excellent reviews and, with the new game featuring 3D graphics rather than the 2D sprite-based graphics of the original, fingers were crossed for something quite exceptional for the Saturn release. Early previews seemed to indicate just this.

Unfortunately, the only thing special about *Rayman 2* was that when it was eventually released in late 1999/early 2000, the Sega Dreamcast, Nintendo 64 and PlayStation 2 consoles were all readily available as were their respective conversions. By then, the promised Saturn version had been shelved permanently.



» [Sega Saturn] *Bomberman* arrives on the Saturn with a brilliant ten-player simultaneous battle mode. Bang on!

CHARTS

AUGUST 1996

PLAYSTATION

1. Ridge Racer Revolution (Namco)
2. Street Fighter Alpha (Virgin Interactive)
3. Adidas Power Soccer (Psygnosis)
4. Alien Trilogy (Acclaim)
5. Need For Speed (Electronic Arts)

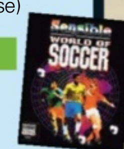
PC

1. Championship Manager 2 (Domark)
2. Duke Nukem 3D (US Gold)
3. Euro '96 (Gremlin Interactive)
4. Dogz (Mindscape)
5. Civilization II (MicroProse)



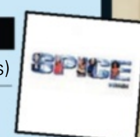
AMIGA

1. Sensible World Of Soccer Euro '96 (Sensible Software)
2. Worms (Ocean)
3. Premier Manager 3 Deluxe (Gremlin Interactive)
4. Tracksuit Manager 2 (Alternative Software)
5. Sensible World Of Soccer 95/96 (Sensible Software)



MUSIC

1. Wannabe (Spice Girls)
2. Macarena (Los Del Rio)
3. Freedom (Robbie Williams)
4. Good Enough (Dodgy)
5. How Bizarre (OMC)




03
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Legend Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

MICKEY'S THIRD ILLUSION

#67

» ASPECT » GAME GEAR » 1995

Sega never released sales figures detailing what its best selling games of the Nineties were. If I had to guess though, I'd say that *Sonic 1* and *2, Columns, Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* and *Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* were the best selling Sega Game Gear games. Why? Because they're the most common games for the system, with countless copies always available on eBay.

It's a little odd, then, that *Legend Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse* – the third and final part of the *Illusion* series – is remarkably unheard of. It's also pretty hard to track down, with the PAL version being particularly rare.

Although somewhat easier than *Castle Of Illusion* and *Land Of Illusion*, it's a tidy and well-presented platformer. Sprites are large, colourful and well-animated, boss battles are clever and innovative while some of the puzzles are rather ingenious. One fine example involves using magnets… or rather, blocks with N and S written on them that repel and attract one another.

About half-way into the game, Mickey gets to visit a colour-changing desert. Some clever graphical trickery has been used to give the illusion of Mickey running along a 3D plane, which still manages to impress. Mickey also gains new skills as the story progresses – he starts out as a humble wash-boy armed with unlimited bars of soap to lob at foes, but later gets more powerful projectiles and the like.

It's evident that a lot of effort went into ensuring the *Illusion* series went out with a bang, making this a hard game to dislike. ✱

RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** MATT
» **JOINED:** 18TH AUG 2008
» **LOCATION:** BRIGHTON
» **OCCUPATION:** BINGO CALLER
» **WEBSITE:** WWW.GAMEASYLUM.COM
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SEGA GAME GEAR



THE MAKING OF

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA® the wind waker™

Some still write it off as the franchise being all at sea, but look deeper and you'll find a Zelda game far closer to the original than any that have come since. Luke Albigés sets sail in search of the surprising truth…



READERS REMEMBER

"I think its amazing that after all the crying over *that* E3 and the mocks of '*Celda*' it's become a game that everyone adores more than recent *Zelda*s. Its got so many great little touches that add to the world but are so subtle you'll miss them, stuff like Link's feet interacting with different floor heights, the way the lighting works and Link's features. Say what you will about the end of the game and missing dungeons, but that will not take away from it being magical"

SACK MAN 64



» [GameCube] Sailing is relaxing, at least until the sun goes down…

READERS REMEMBER

"Absolutely magnificent game. I'm a huge *Zelda* fan but for some reason *WW* took me about three attempts to get into, but when I did finally get into it I loved it and couldn't put it down. The graphics/style are great and still look fab today whilst the gameplay is fun. I even enjoyed the sailing as I found it quite relaxing floating around the open seas. I also enjoyed plugging in the GBA and finding the Tingle statues which added extra elements. Overall I think it's a fantastic game and easily in my top five *Zelda* games"

DSTE

So you most likely already have your favourite *Zelda* game locked down. Everyone does, it seems. Many cite the exceptional 3D rebirth of the franchise that is *Ocarina Of Time*, 16-bit purists wouldn't dare name anything other than *A Link To The Past* while a few stragglers would point to Game Boy debut *Link's Awakening*, to which we'd offer the universal sign for 'good choice'. Which is an assured nod, in case you were wondering. A far less popular choice, however, would be the one and only GameCube outing, *The Wind Waker* – liberties were taken with structure, mechanics and style that meant that this particular game sticks out like a toon-shaded sore thumb alongside the rest of the series. But does that make it a bad choice? Does it hell. If anything, there's more of the NES original in *The Wind Waker* than there is in any *Zelda* game previously or since, although it might not be immediately apparent through the cartoon visuals and the watery setting.

Speaking with Eiji Aonuma, we learn that Link's primary companion on the vast open seas was written from experience. "We were working on *Wind Waker* right around the time that my son was born," he recalls. "Having just become a father, I wrote the text for the King Of Red Lions, the talking boat who takes Link on his adventure, as if I was talking to my own son." It's a beautiful sentiment, but one with which Aonuma isn't entirely happy. "Looking back over that text now, I felt as if he had a really self-important attitude and was forcing Link to go along with him. I regretted that a bit and changed the way he speaks to be a bit more mild in the remake."

But rewind to before that and you'll see a developer in what *killer7*'s gimp might retroactively describe as 'a tight spot'. After blowing minds and dropping jaws with *Ocarina Of Time* and ambitious follow-up *Majora's Mask*, Nintendo found itself in a tricky situation. A new console meant all the old faces had to come back out to play – Mario had to bolt on a superfluous jetpack while we'd see the world through Samus' eyes for the first time, but what of Link? "Right when *Majora's Mask* ended, we already knew that GameCube was going to be our next platform, so

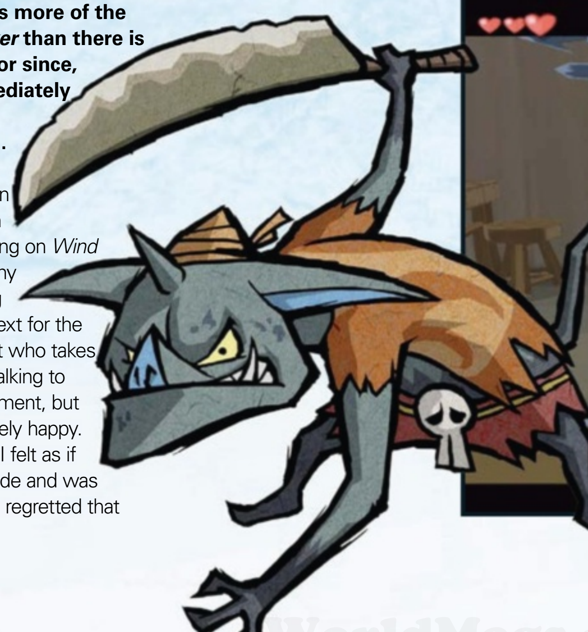


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD
- » **RELEASED:** 2002
- » **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

» [GameCube] Training with Orca gets Link his first sword. Lovely.









» [GameCube] Not that we needed to be told how swords work…


» [GameCube] Shame nobody keeps their cash in their lawn in real life.


» [GameCube] Might want to avoid that big, glowy orange patch.



> "I wrote the text for the King Of Red Lions as if I was talking to my own son"
> Eiji Aonuma

we had to begin planning for that," explained Shigeru Miyamoto in a Nintendo interview about the game in 2004. "The reason we were able to show you the more realistic-looking *Zelda* battle at Space World 2000 was because we had been doing some preliminary experiments with the console prior to completing *Majora's Mask*. That's why that video existed. It wasn't until afterward that we began working with the director and the programmers to go ahead and create *The Wind Waker*."

But there was quite a difference between the Space World demo and the game that was actually in development. "That announcement was shocking to *Zelda* fans," recalls Nintendo's Satoru Iwata. "Many were surprised and puzzled." Indeed they were – the Space World tech demo (for that's all it turned out to be) showed off a mature Link, while the game itself would take a decidedly different tack. "When I first saw the toon-shaded *Zelda*, I was very surprised and excited by it," admitted Miyamoto. "However, I was startled by the response we got from the press when we showed it off the first time. They all said, 'Oh, so is Nintendo now taking *Zelda* and trying to aim it only at kids?' Really, the whole concept we had behind it was that we thought it was a very creative and new way to show off Link. All of a sudden it had been interpreted as Nintendo's new strategy, and that was a shock for us."

And just like that, a change in art style divided a fan base almost overnight. "When something unexpected happens, the first reaction people have is to be wary," Aonuma tells us. "We expected a negative reaction at the show. Although I don't regret anything, part of the reaction was that this version of *Zelda* looked 'kiddy' and we weren't able to shake that off with any of the PR we did later. We encountered an awful lot of problems from the drastic leap we took with *Wind Waker*."

Miyamoto also wanted it to be known that this was not just change for change's sake. "When it comes to Nintendo strategy, it's not that we want to make games for kids," he explained. "It's that we want to make them creative while appealing to a wider audience. Obviously we see games as entertainment, ▶

READERS REMEMBER

"One of my favourite memories from this game was sailing and then looking back behind me to see how far away I came from, with the starting island now further back but somewhat visible. Yeah, it probably got old for some people later in the game, but back then that blew my mind"
ALK



▶ and we want to find the best way to make the gameplay experience entertaining for everyone." But it was too late. Already, many of the *Zelda* hardcore had jumped ship based on the cartoon-style visuals of the new game, while yet more of the unconverted chased the impossible dream of photorealism on PS2 and Xbox. Hindsight is Link's best friend in this respect. Which ages better – the flat-colour shading of *Wind Waker* or the London-aping nonsense of *The Getaway*? *Wind Waker*'s look is timeless, as evidenced by the recent HD version on Wii U – a spot of tidying up and it's instantly the best-looking game on a self-professed next-gen console, whereas any PS2 game from the same era would take tens of thousands of man hours to scrub up to the same level.

And in that respect, we have our first analog with the series' origins. No matter how many photo-realistic games are released from now until the rest of forever,

> "Part of the reaction was that this Zelda looked 'kiddy'"
> Eiji Aonuma

A Link To The Past will *still* look good. And with Link's colourful and relatively basic look in *The Wind Waker*, we see exactly the same thing. It's a timeless art style, not one hung up on chasing the latest tech or trends and as such, it's one that still looks amazing today. But by Miyamoto's own admission, it's not the style that saw *Wind Waker* get the green light so much as the inherent practicality.

"It's not so much that we wanted to go with the toon shading as it is that we are really happy with the proportions of Link in the game," he recalls. "We liked the fact that we can have the package art match the artwork in the game. In the past you'd have a Game Boy *Zelda* game and a home console *Zelda* game where the art styles didn't match. On top of that, the art style on the boxes didn't match the art style in the



» [GameCube] "HEY! LISTEN!" No. We can work this out for ourselves, thanks.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

There are many highlights in Link's maiden maritime adventure. Here are just a few of the absolute finest…



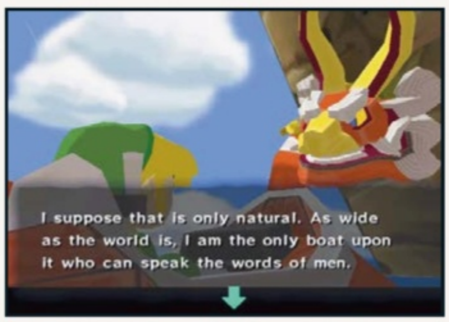
THE STORY SO FAR

■ Not only is *The Wind Waker* one of the few games in the series to acknowledge Link's previous adventures, it also manages to do so in a striking way. The game begins with the entire history of Hyrule told through woodcarving pictures and subtitled folklore (for those who don't speak Hylian), this adventure's mythology forged by Link's exploits in older games. Genius.



TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

■ You can't stay on Outset Island forever, you know. After Aryll's kidnapping and Link's rather brief training in swordsmanship, it's time to leave your home and set out in search of adventure and your missing sister. Townsfolk gather on the beach, but it's the final shots of Link's gran watching from afar that really give you a kick in the tear ducts.



THE BOAT CAN TALK?!

■ Both the setting and the game's cover sort of gave away the fact that Link would take charge of his own boat, but we weren't expecting it to be alive. That's just weird. The King Of Red Lions proves to be a good friend to our hero, although we can't say we appreciated him stopping us from exploring the world early on…



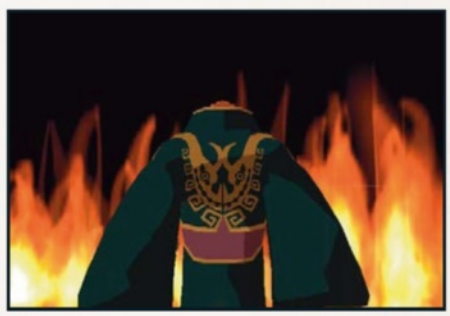
MY FIRST SUNKEN TREASURE

■ Sailing around with glowing plumes erupting from under waves is frustrating early on but, once you get the grappling hook, all that booty can be yours. There's enormous satisfaction to be gleaned from using clues and logic to find a treasure map's big score, but even the regular treasures are a nice little touch.



FLASHBACK

■ With three orbs under your belt, you're able to unearth the game's first big secret – the Tower Of The Gods. Survive its trials and you're ready to take a trip through time, venturing into the submerged Hyrule Castle to get a glimpse at what this world was like before the sea claimed it. It's both a novel twist and a way to excite fans of the series, of which there are quite a few.



THE SHOWDOWN

■ There is no shortage of great boss battles across the Zelda series, but *Wind Waker*'s final battle with Ganon sits comfortably in the top flight. It's an epic encounter the likes of which few modern games can touch, the music and the setting lending brilliantly to the sense of occasion and importance. But how do you beat him? Well now… that would be telling.



games. We've really tried to cut back on that, so you can see the same Link across the different platforms."

It's here that design manager Satoru Takizawa jumps in. "We had been trying to figure out which graphical direction to take for the next *Zelda* game. And we wondered whether continuing the path taken by *Ocarina Of Time* and evolving upon it by giving it more detail was really the right path," he revealed in that same 2004 interview. The Space World demo had inadvertently shown the world a *Zelda* game it was not to receive any time soon, but Nintendo was confident in its decision both on visual and gameplay levels. "Another benefit of those visuals was how we could represent the mechanisms and objects for puzzles in a more easy-to-understand way," Takizawa continued. "When the visuals are photorealistic, it had the adverse effect of making information difficult to represent game-wise."

But it wasn't just the style that would prove to be a sticking point for *The Wind Waker* – it was the setting itself. The rolling hills of *Ocarina Of Time* were shunted aside for rolling waves in a controversial twist. But again, it's one that harks back to the series' earlier adventures more than most. *Ocarina* and *Majora* both do a decent job of presenting the illusion of freedom, but with your own ship (and once the good ol' King Of Red Lions allows it), the rolling waves are your very own playground. In earlier games, breaking sequence would simply result in a dead end. Here, the main path may be blocked but there are still other things to investigate and explore – each of the 49 main islands on the map offers something to do whether you're a keyholder or not, some offering extra goodies while others purely tease great rewards once certain key equipment is obtained. Just mapping the whole seascape is its own reward, feeding the fish to fill out the map and make mental (or, if you're proper hardcore, graph paper) notes of what else lies in store once certain gear has been unlocked.

One of the basic prerequisites for exploring the entire map was having the wind on your side, which was apparently something that Nintendo had been meaning to offer players for some time. "For a long time we'd wanted to be able to use wind in games," said Miyamoto. "We'd had windy stages in the *Super Mario* games before, but really it wasn't until we were able to use the technology of the GameCube and some of the visual styles possible with it that we were able to really show wind blowing in a videogame. So, that was one of the things we decided to challenge ourselves with, which made it a driving force behind *The Wind Waker*."

But while other games were roping in voice actors to help flesh out their characters and stories, *The Legend Of Zelda* would remain one told through body language and subtitles. "We obviously carried this on from the previous *Zelda* games," explained Zelda veteran Eiji Aonuma. "We can express what we want within the game without having to use a lot of voice acting. While I can't say for certain it will always be like that with *Zelda* games, the way we did it for *The Wind Waker* is suitable for the world. Also, as people have played *Zelda* over the years, they have formed their own ideas of how Link might sound. If we were to put a voice in there that might not match up with someone's image, then there would be a backlash to that. So we tried to avoid that."

In fact, the real beauty of *Wind Waker* is that so little of it even needs explaining, to the point where we were comfortably able to finish it in Japanese back in the day. This is not a complex story, rather one made interesting by the characters and the life breathed into them by new hardware. "Once we decided to go in ▶



» [GameCube] The Tingle Tuner is sadly absent from the Wii U remake.



» [GameCube] Carrying a really big pig. Just another day at the office…

READERS REMEMBER

"I think *Wind Waker* is a great game, on an epic scale. The sailing can get a bit annoying, especially when you don't play for a while then can't remember where you need to go! But the cel-shaded graphics and gameplay are perfect in my opinion"

FLYING_DELOREAN81



ZELDA HIGHLIGHTS

A LINK TO THE PAST (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1991

LINK'S AWAKENING DX
SYSTEM: GBC
YEAR: 1998

OCARINA OF TIME
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1998



» [GameCube] Mad Maestro, eat your heart out. Link's a pro.




» [GameCube] Link's gadgets work differently when used on the boat.

the toon shading direction, we thought it would be important to use the technology as much as possible so we could draw out the natural features of the world," revealed Aonuma. "We wanted to show Link's expressions, and the eyes became very important. Gradually, as we managed to program the movement of the eyes, we began to look at different ways we could make use of that. It became part of the natural process of figuring out how to make Link feel more alive and aware of his surroundings. It was through this natural process that we began to put in items that would attract Link's attention."

And though some feat of game development witchcraft, this relatively simple feature would change the entire game. Link's awareness of his own surroundings became a hint system of sorts, his gaze wandering towards key objects, nearby enemies or puzzle items. It all feels incredibly natural but also helps out on a gameplay level without the need for any intrusive HUD elements or similar modern convention. "When we decided to use the eyes in this way, we considered changing Link's eye color throughout the game," Miyamoto mused. "There were points in the game where we programmed it so his eyes were bright red while he was fighting, and there were some different opinions on that. Obviously, one of the concerns was that you could only see the color of his eyes if the camera was looking at him from the front. But, even if you could see his eyes we thought it felt a little strange. So, ultimately we decided not to do that."

Even so, the wandering eyes and increased emotion evident on Link's face proved to be one of the most popular and memorable features of the game – it isn't often that such emotion can be so easily conveyed by a game character and being able to read and identify with the protagonist so easily and universally was something we had never really seen in a game before. It was an ingenious system, both making the main character seem aware of the world around him while offering gameplay advice at the same time – pause to survey the scene and Link will glance at key objects with the very same eyes that were just surprised by a rogue Moblin, his gaze clearly drawn to the most important thing at that time. Even without the proposed colour changes, it's a mechanic that works brilliantly.

Wind Waker had it all: exploration, innovation, freedom, looks… It's crazy that people aren't falling over themselves to proclaim this the best *Zelda* game, though nostalgia dictates that popular vote *Ocarina Of Time* must be crowned king. But for all the risks it took and innovations it made, we can't see *Wind Waker* as anything less than a prince, and a bloody good-looking one at that. Ultimately, the style is what put many people off and Nintendo knows it. But the risk paid off and Aonuma was so taken with the look that it was



» [GameCube] Yeah, running away here might not be a terrible plan…

READERS REMEMBER

"Ganondorf is amazing in this, he gives a speech about the fate of his people and Link's that is threatening, sad and understandable. You could completely understand why he was the way he was, it's the first time I'd seen him with more motive than "bwhahahahahaha!" And that final fight with him outside of Shadow of the Colossus – I don't think I've seen a fight end in such quiet violence"

UNOFFICIAL WHO





WIND WAKER HD

How Nintendo is updating the best GameCube Zelda for a new generation of gamers

After successfully bringing *Ocarina Of Time* to a whole new audience with the 3DS remaster, Nintendo's decision to do the same on Wii U didn't come as much of a surprise. Its choice of game, however, did. As much as we love *Wind Waker*, most rumours and speculation pointed towards *Majora's Mask* being next in line for the HD treatment. But we're glad this was the game that won out in the end, if only because the art style lends itself perfectly to a 1080p transition. While *Ocarina* looks great on the smaller screen of the 3DS, the work that would need to be done to get the same clarity on a large TV screen would basically amount to remaking the game from scratch. But with *Wind Waker*'s stylised look, all it takes is some edge smoothing and a few fancy new effects and it looks every bit the modern classic.

So it looks the business in HD – almost exactly as you remember the original looking, in fact – but there has been some tidying up on a gameplay level as well. One of the lengthier fetch quests has been streamlined to improve pacing and flow, while upgraded sails allow users to sail at a much greater pace regardless of wind direction. You can still use the basic sail if you'd rather but, once you've already covered most of the map, it's actually quite nice to have the option of an extra burst of speed – it can even make sailing an enjoyable alternative to simply abusing the fast-travel magic, which has to count for something. There's even a new Hero Mode – in which Link takes double damage and no health hearts can be found in containers or dropped by enemies – if you fancy putting your skills to the test. *Wind Waker* is a legendary game, and the HD remaster absolutely does it justice.




» [GameCube] Cunning swordplay can help to undress armoured guards.

EXTREME MAKEOVER

Other franchises that underwent dramatic changes in look and feel



CASTLEVANIA

BEFORE: SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
AFTER: CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

■ With a successful string of hardcore action-platformers under its belt, Konami took the brave decision to bring in RPG elements for the series' PlayStation debut. Between stat growth, inventory management and *Metroid*-style map layout that promotes backtracking and exploration, it's little wonder this became the template for most *Castlevania* games that followed.





BOMBERMAN

BEFORE: SUPER BOMBERMAN
AFTER: BOMBERMAN: ACT ZERO

■ There are few franchises that stand to benefit from a gritty reinvention less than *Bomberman* – you might as well make a new *Mario Kart* where Toad drops nailbombs out the window of a stretch Hummer. This grotty Xbox 360 reboot was an utter mess in every respect – it even had a mode called First Person Bomber, which, inexplicably, was third-person. Absolute rubbish.





R-TYPE

BEFORE: R-TYPE
AFTER: R-TYPE TACTICS

■ *R-Type* is widely regarded as one of the greatest horizontal shooters of all time, delivering fantastic visuals, freakish bosses and exceptional level design. Sequels followed and stuck to the same path, until Irem decided to turn the series into a turn-based strategy game for the PSP in 2007. It feels odd at first, but ends up working surprisingly well. A sequel, also on PSP, followed in 2009.





RESIDENT EVIL

BEFORE: RESIDENT EVIL 2
AFTER: RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ Static backgrounds, zombies and hammy horror were all staples of the Capcom franchise until it was time to leave the 32-bit consoles behind. Although *Resident Evil 0* stuck largely to the same formula, *Resi 4* went for an over-the-shoulder camera and made things grittier and more cinematic (not to mention more action-heavy), paving the way for the franchise's current Hollywood-friendly style.



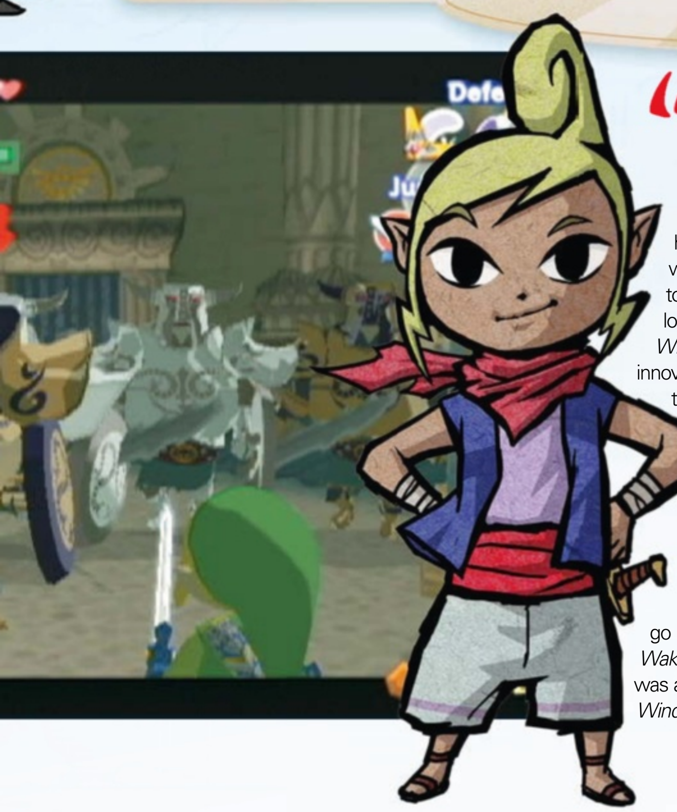


MARIO

BEFORE: SUPER MARIO BROS
AFTER: SUPER MARIO 64

■ Nintendo's mastery of 2D platforming is hard to dispute. But for a launch title to sit alongside its new 64-bit hardware, that wasn't going to cut it. The solution? Borrow *SMB3*'s hub-based structure, befriend the third dimension and both create and define a new genre in the same breath. Yeah, that'll do it. Outside of the *Galaxy* games, it's still the pinnacle of 3D platforming.





"For a long time we'd wanted to be able to use wind in games"

Shigeru Miyamoto

his go-to style for Link's Wii U debut. "When we were discussing what kind of graphical style to use for the new *Zelda* game on Wii U we looked at a variety of past games as reference. *Wind Waker* was the game that had the most innovative graphics and yet, due to the capabilities of the hardware at the time, it was not able to fully achieve that potential," he tells us. "Thanks to this HD version the developers can now finally make it look like it was always meant to. We decided to release this version because we thought that users would also be able to share in that feeling."

And this, apparently, was the first choice for a remake. "The game that I most wanted to go back to and make it more accessible was *Wind Waker*," Aonuma reveals to us. "I'm really glad that I was able to do that." Fret not though, N64 fans – with *Wind Waker HD* now on the shelves, the next game on the HD checklist might be a little more up your street. "But there is one other title that I have some regrets about in terms of game design because of the very short time we had for development, and that's *Majora's Mask*. I'd like to have a go at that if I get an opportunity." But as much as he (and indeed we) might look forward to that, *Wind Waker* taught Nintendo an important lesson in terms of how much a game's visuals can shake even the most stalwart fan base.

"I think we will be a bit more careful in future, but if we find a new approach that not just the developers, but also the users would enjoy then I think we will want to break new ground again," Aonuma laughs. "But we haven't found such an approach yet…"

Special thanks to Eiji Aonuma. Additional quotes courtesy of Nintendo Of America's official 2004 round table transcription with Shigeru Miyamoto, Satoru Takizawa and Eiji Aonuma.


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A LINK TO THE CAST

Your bluffer's guide to the bizarre people that call the Great Sea home

1 **LINK**
■ If you don't know this guy, you're probably reading the wrong magazine. The Hero Of Time reborn, rocking a slick, yet practical green ensemble.

ARYLL 2
■ Link's little sister, who gets kidnapped by a giant bird (who mistakes her for Tetra) at the start of the game. Still, at least she gives you her telescope before she gets carted off…

3 **KING OF RED LIONS**
■ A magical boat with a talking figurehead. Still, at least this particular *Zelda* companion doesn't shout 'HEY! LISTEN!' at you every three seconds.

TETRA 4
■ The spunky pirate leader that goes easy on Link. She was supposed to have her own game called *Tetra's Trackers*, which only surfaced in Japan and under a different name.

5 **GRANDMA**
■ Has gaming's depiction of the elderly sunk so low that we don't need to give them names any more? Apparently so. Still, Link's granny is a star.

GANONDORF 6
■ Again, you've probably had more than a few run-ins with this dude in the past. In keeping with the swashbuckling theme, he seems to prefer swords over magic this time out.

7 **MAKAR**
■ This little *Princess Mononoke* extra plays a mean violin, but that's not the extent of his powers. And no, we don't just mean the cool leaf mask…

MEDLI 8
■ There aren't many characters in *Zelda* canon that you get to throw around, so Medli will be remembered for this if nothing else. The young Rito girl is Valoo's attendant.

9 **FADO**
■ The Wind Sage, and the only Kokiri representative to appear in *The Wind Waker*. Apparently he's friends with the original Hero Of Time.

LARUTO 10
■ You'd have thought the Zora would be okay after Hyrule was flooded. You'd have thought wrong. The Earth Sage only appears to Link in spirit form.

11 **VALOO**
■ A dragon with an island named after him and the Rito clan looking out for him, Valoo has it pretty good. Well, apart from the huge horrible centipede thing that won't leave his tail alone…

ZEPHOS 12
■ The more level of the two Wind God siblings, this cloud-riding frog helps Link out by making sure he learns the Wind's Requiem. And by pointing out that his brother is a bit of a dick.

13 **CYCLOS**
■ The second froggy cloud-rider isn't quite so kind – Link has to try and defeat him amid a hurricane in order to learn the Ballad Of Gales.

KOMALI 14
■ A timid Rito prince who is particularly attached to an orb that makes him feel better. An orb that you probably want to get him to part with, somehow…

15 **TINGLE**
■ The midlife crisis, personified. This fairy wannabe just so happens to be really good at deciphering maps, although his rates border on the extortionate.

BEEDLE 16
■ A salesman who roams the seas plying his trade. He doesn't often have much of use beyond extra bait, although his friends occasionally carry some useful gear.

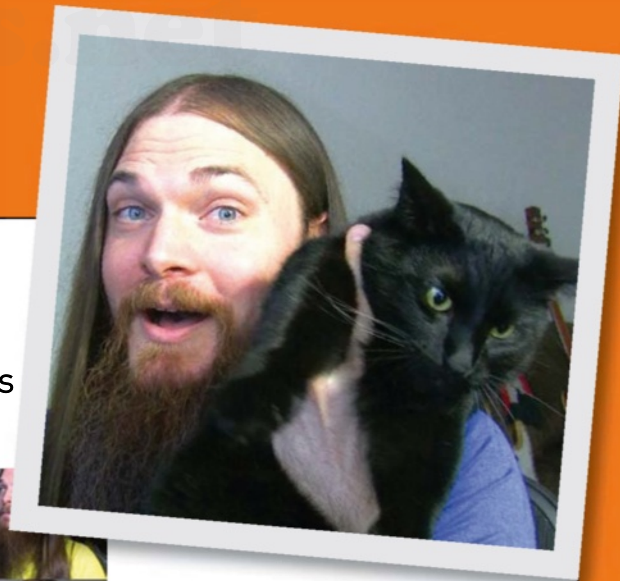
17 **FISHMEN**
■ There's one of these talking fish for every square of the map. Track them down and give them dinner and they'll map the area for you, as well as offering a word of obvious advice.

GONZO 18
■ The muscle of Tetra's pirate crew. Don't expect much in the way of insight from him but if you ever need anything bashing to bits, he's not a bad person to know.

19 **NUDGE**
■ Tetra's personal bodyguard and the member of her crew who knows her best. He's also apparently stronger than Gonzo but we've seen no proof to that effect.

QUILL 20
■ A Rito delivery man who offers a few pieces of sage advice to Link over the course of his journey. When he should probably be delivering letters. The slacker.

A MOMENT WITH...



Smooth McGroove

We speak to YouTube's latest gaming celebrity to find out how he creates his fantastic a cappella renditions of classic videogame compositions

Who is Smooth McGroove?

YouTube's latest videogame hero is better known by his real name, Max Gleeson. He initially worked full-time giving private music lessons, but has decided to focus on his fantastic a cappella renditions of tunes from classic videogames. He routinely records his videos with numerous parts and is usually accompanied in them by his pet cat Charl.



Where did you get the idea for making your videos?
It happened on a whim while I was stuck writing an original song. I decided to cover a videogame tune, but only use my voice to make it interesting. I had fun with it, so I kept at it!

Which other retro YouTubers do you admire and why?
I admire any YouTuber who promotes the wealth of classic games, past or present. I tend to do music from older games because they remind me of my childhood, but lots of great newer games exist too.

How important is it for you to get regular content up?
It's important for me because I've made this my living, but it also helps keep me motivated week to week!

Why do you think your channel has become so popular?
Videogame music, especially classic videogame music, really connects with anyone who played those games. It reminds us all of simpler times and also of the great memories we had playing those games.

How long does it roughly take to create a single video?
It usually takes between five and seven days from start to finish. I have my sights set on some that may take longer though…

What is the biggest number of instruments you have mimicked for any one video?
Probably 16 or more, like in the *Final Fantasy VII* battle theme. It definitely gets more difficult the more instruments I add because of the complexity and video editing involved.

Which one proved the most difficult for you to recreate?
UN Owen Was Her? was very technically difficult, and so was *Jenova*. Any song with massive amounts of syncopation or fast arpeggios takes quite a bit of time to get right.

Are all the sounds produced completely by yourself? Do you use backing tracks?
I only use my voice to make these videos. Sometimes you'll hear reverb or equalizing, which I add in post production to make the mix sound right.

You've managed to put together quite a few Nintendo compositions. Did the NES mean a lot to you?
I played a lot of Super Nintendo as a kid because I owned one, but I did play Sega and NES as well. I had an Atari first, but I was too young to remember much about it

Which is your favourite composition?
It's hard to pick a favourite when so many good videogame songs exist…

Have any videogame companies been in touch with you? They should.
Maybe! I can't really talk about things like that until they materialise.

Is there any musical piece you've been unable to replicate?
Actually I did encounter one recently. The melody goes too far outside the range of the human voice… so I had to back out. I'd like to find a way around it somehow, but still preserve what makes the song sound great.

We're guessing you're a big fan of RPGs. What do you like about them?
I enjoy the creativity that the developers put into expansive worlds and the music that colours them. Some of my most vivid videogame memories come from the hours I spent playing well-made RPGs.

What's the best compliment you've had about your arrangements?
When Square Enix praised my *Final Fantasy VII* video in a comment or Capcom did the same… It doesn't get much better than that!

What does your cat think of your videos?
He doesn't seem to think anything of them really. He's a very passive cat…

OUR TOP TUNES

Darran Jones
Castlevania – Bloody Tears

Jon Wells
Super Mario World – Overworld Theme

Steve Holmes
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time – Song Of Storms

» Smooth McGroove typically has the game he's covering in the middle of the screen as he plays out its instruments. This is *Chrono Trigger's Corridors Of Time.*

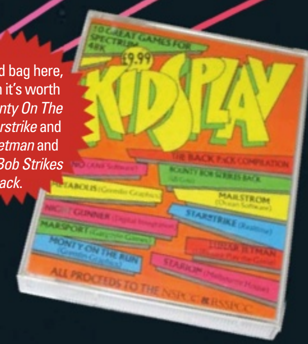




» This was a solid compilation that featured the rather spiffy Crash edition of *Dizzy II*. You got some cool tips as well.



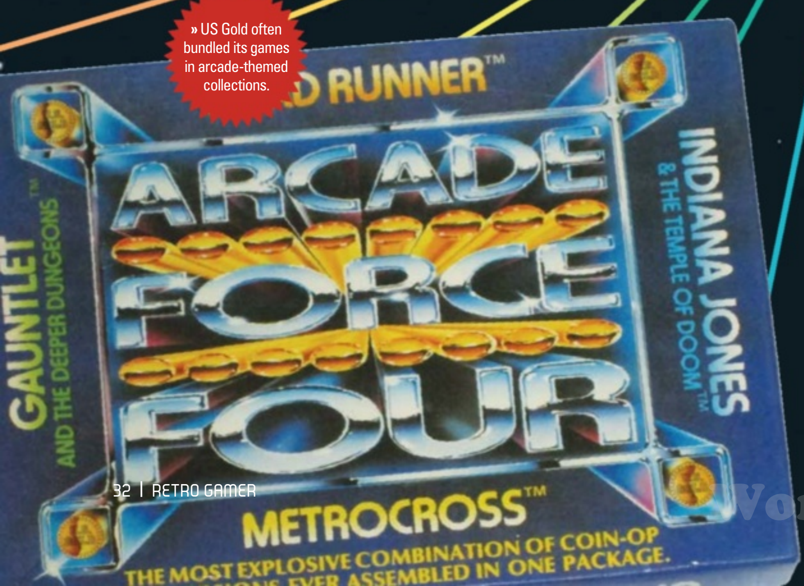
» Budget publisher Alternative boasted four action games for £2.99 in *4-Most Warzone* that proved popular.



» A mixed bag here, although it's worth it for *Monty On The Run*, *Starstrike* and *Lunar Jetman* and *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*.

COMPILATION KINGS

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CLASSIC COMPILATION



» US Gold often bundled its games in arcade-themed collections.





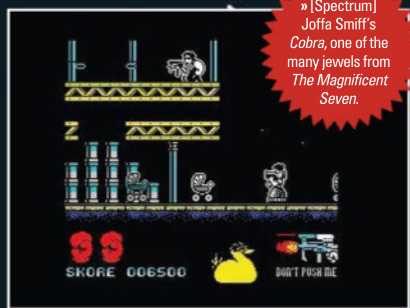
» Endorsed by *Crash* but missing *Pentagram* – *Ultimate: The Collected Works*.



» *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* included three new games.

25 years ago the videogame compilation ruled. Graeme Mason recalls some of the finest, most notable examples and tells more of this curiously 8-bit phenomenon and why successive generations have not quite been the same…

If you were to highlight the first game compilation it would arguably be the Zanussi Ping-O-Tronic, a machine released in 1974 that featured both *Pong* and *Pong Doubles*. Many other similar systems followed, all sporting several games. Standalone game compilations, the focus of this article, included the likes of Fairchild's *Videocart-1*, and Atari's *Combat*. However, many like Guy Wilhelmy, co-founder of Cascade Games and creator of the infamous Cascade *Cassette 50*, also created collections in the late Seventies. Guy's first company, Databank, sold the *Petssette* – 20 Commodore PET programs for £20 – although it contained utilities such as the mouth-wateringly-titled *Cash Register* and *Stock Control* in addition to 11 games, at a time when getting so many games at once was most definitely a rarity regardless of their quality. Leaf through an early issue of *PCW* and you'll find adverts for similar efforts, making it almost impossible to discern which was the first one. So, we'll bail out of that particular question and move onto the most famous – or rather infamous – early compilation.



» [Spectrum] Joffa Smiff's *Cobra*, one of the many jewels from *The Magnificent Seven*.

> "I called around and asked publishers and developers to donate a strong title"
> Quicksilva's Rod Cousens

Like many other software companies of the time, Cascade began its life with mail order; but it had a secret weapon. "It always annoyed me that a five minute cassette was nearly the same price as a 45 minute one," says Guy, "and as a result I nearly always used full-length cassettes before having the idea of putting more games on each cassette to use up the extra space." In 1982, with *Cassette 50*, Guy took his theory to what many viewed as ridiculous extremes. Of course, the downside was that, despite him working day and night to create as many games as he could, the quality of these BASIC-powered gems was – ahem – not the greatest. "But I wanted a product that had so many titles on it that no-one else would try and compete."

Most gamers looked for genuine value for money over other considerations, and what this meant was the inclusion of previously full-price releases. A compilation was instantly superior if it included games that, a few months earlier, would have almost cost the same price each as the entire compilation did. If there were enough games, it didn't even matter if some of them were duffers as long as they had been *full price* duffers.

Surprisingly, it was the record industry that kick-started this era. Record compilations were already big business thanks to labels such as Virgin, K-Tel and Telstar. It wasn't long before the people behind these gate-sleeved collections cast their gaze across to the software industry with an eye to applying a similar process to games. Beau Jolly, run by two ex-K-Tel ▶

CON-PILATIONS

Four of the dullest compilations

CASSETTE 50

1983, £9.95, CASCADE

■ An offer that initially seemed too good to miss, this assembly of BASIC games was soon surpassed by highly superior machine-code games. Yet *Cassette 50* became a money-spinner for Cascade, still selling either via mail-order or as part of computer hardware bundles well into 1987. And you got a free calculator watch.



DON'T BUY THIS

1985, £2.50, FIREBIRD

■ While **Retro Gamer** acknowledges that this Firebird compilation was ever-so-slightly tongue-in-cheek, it doesn't excuse the breathtakingly dull and unplayable nature of the games. Even at £2.50, *Don't Buy This* was poor value for money when you consider alternatives such as Firebird's own *Booty* for the same money.



THE GOLD COLLECTION III

1987, £9.95, US GOLD

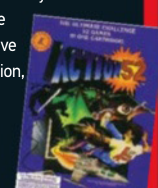
■ US Gold's *Gold Collections* had been hit-and-miss affairs up until this third outing, which managed to be almost uniformly disappointing. Arcade conversions *Express Raider* and *BreakThru* were flat and uninspiring and *Martianoids* demonstrated that Ultimate's heyday was long behind it. *Crystal Castles* was the one shining gem.



ACTION 52

NES – 1991 & GENESIS – 1993, $199, ACTIVE ENTERPRISES

■ At a ridiculous $199, this unofficial multicart has become legendary. Boasting of "The Ultimate Challenge", the only challenge was whether you could stand playing any of the games for more than five minutes. The NES version, developed by Active itself, edges it in terms of dreadful games and terminal bugs.



» By 1989, Beau Jolly had resorted to collections of 30 games to disguise the dip in quality, although it was actually a rather cheeky combination of two earlier compilations.





» Gremlin's *Game Crazy* attempted to rival Ocean's *Game, Set And Match*.

COMPILATION TIMELINE

Your guide to the most important releases

1976

■ Fairchild's *Videocart-1* is one of the earliest examples of a game compilation that isn't built into a system. It contains *Tic Tac Toe*, *Shooting Gallery*, *Doodle* and *Quadradoodle*.

1982

■ BASIC compilations are everywhere with Cascade's *Cassette 50* the most notable and heavily advertised. Rivals such as Anco's *50 Arcade Games For Your Micro* attempt, and fail, to compete.

1984

■ *Select 1*, the first major multi-publisher compilation hits the streets, backed by famous record company Telstar. In line with its roots, TV advertising is used heavily to promote the cassette.

1985

■ Beau Jolly releases the first in its series, *10 Computer Hits*. Ocean Software (under label The Hit Squad, which would eventually be used for its budget range) releases its first compilations, most notably *They Sold A Million*. Two more in the series follow.

1986

■ *4 Crash Smashes* (*Alien 8*, *Spy Hunter*, *Night Gunner*, *Dun Darach*) and *4 Zzap! Sizzlers* (*Dropzone*, *Thing On A Spring*, *Who Dares Wins II*, *Wizard's Lair*) are released by Gremlin Graphics, with official endorsement from Newsfield.

1987

■ Ocean bombards the market with *Game, Set And Match* (offering 20 events over ten games), *Live Ammo* and the magnificent, er, *Magnificent Seven*. Which had eight games. Genius. Also, Elite releases a trio of unreleased games entitled… *Trio*.

1988

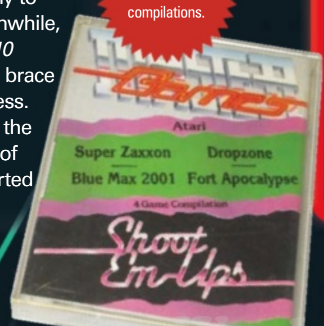
■ As competition intensifies, budget leader Mastertronic enters the market with *Megaplay*, which collects six of its better budget games for £9.99. Many compilations are devalued with their games appearing on budget as well.





» [C64] *Jinn Genie* from the original *10 Computer Hits* by Beau Jolly.

▶ employees, had enjoyed reasonable success with their packages of old Imagine Software games; by 1985 they were busy contacting software houses and giving a broader variety of old stock a new lease of life. A few months earlier, Virgin had released a single-cassette compilation, *Now Games*, of which the late Mike Singleton's *Lords Of Midnight* was a highlight. But even earlier was Computer Records's *Select 1*, released just in time for Christmas 1984 and backed by the famous UK record label Telstar. Sean O'Brien and Neil Palmer had formed Telstar just two years earlier with the purpose of releasing music compilations. They took the same process they used to acquire music tracks to games, negotiating deals and royalties with each separate publisher and hoping to tap into a new market. Under the new label (so as to avoid accusations of Telstar simply 'cashing in'), *Select 1* was a moderate success that persuaded the record company to begin its own software development. Meanwhile, Beau Jolly scored big with *Mega Hits* and *10 Computer Hits* and Virgin released another brace of *Now Games* to varying degrees of success. Compilations were beginning to impact on the games charts; it was now merely a matter of time before the major software houses started to take note.



» An early US Gold series of compilations.

WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD

Every gamer needs to own these classics

10 COMPUTER HITS

1985, £9.95, BEAU JOLLY

■ Having decided to approach several different publishers, Beau Jolly worked its way down the charts, acquiring as many hits as possible over different genres – a method it had utilised before in compiling records. Containing several Spectrum classics, debate will always rage as to the best game in this compilation. *Skool Daze*, *Harrier Attack* and *Chuckie Egg* are all Speccy legends, and the supporting cast wasn't bad either with *Project Future*, *Jasper* and *Wriggler* all having secured *Crash* Smash status upon initial release.



4 CRASH SMASHES II

1986, £9.95, GREMLIN GRAPHICS

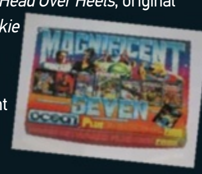
■ The original of this series was, by its very nature, a solid collection, but slightly creaking with the age of some of its games. In this follow-up, Gremlin Graphics successfully acquired a fantastic quartet of more recent games, with multi-directional shooter *Z* replacing the amusing isometric adventure *Sweevo's World* on the Commodore 64 version. Steve Crow's *Starquake* and a brace of high-scoring Gremlin Graphics games completed the compilation. These were *Bounder* and *Monty On The Run*.



THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

1987, £9.95, OCEAN

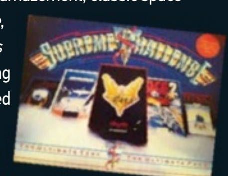
■ To many Eighties gamers there were brilliant compilations, and then there was the *Mag Seven* as it became colloquially known. Despite the iconic moniker, it actually contained eight games and for once there was barely a weak link in the line-up. The standouts were Denton Designs' evocative *The Great Escape* and Joffa Smith's crowning achievement, *Cobra*. Mix in Jon Ritman's fantastic *Head Over Heels*, original arcade adventure *Frankie* and the colour-crazy *Wizball* and you had weeks of entertainment for a mere £9.95.



SUPREME CHALLENGE

1988, £12.95, BEAU JOLLY

■ By 1988 Beau Jolly was struggling to acquire the more popular and better-selling games for its compilations, giving it a reputation for bargain-basement collections rather than true outstanding value. *Supreme Challenge*, therefore, was something of a surprise. Rainbird's *Starglider* and Firebird's *The Sentinel* provided the technical amazement; classic space trading adventure *Elite*, addictive puzzler *Tetris* and speedy dog-fighting blaster *Ace 2* completed an incredibly solid and entertaining set.





» One of Beau Jolly's many compilations from the mid-Eighties.

1989
■ The magazines begin to covermount compilations of their own. Up to a dozen games on a cassette are common. Beau Jolly, forced to specialise by the market, releases the successful *Tolkien Trilogy* and Codemasters cuts loading times with the *CD Games Pack*.

1990
■ Even more budget labels get on the act with Codemasters (Quattro) and Alternative (4-Most) re-releasing four of their old games on slightly higher-priced single cassette collections.

1991
■ Supreme C64 publisher, System 3, publishes *The Premier Collection* on C64 diskette, showcasing six of its finest games.

1992
■ Sega begins its *Mega Games* (*Triple Score* in the US) series which initially includes three games per cartridge. It ultimately combines the games for a series of cheeky six-game compilations that re-use several titles such as *Columns*.

1996
■ Inspired by *Cassette 50*, the first Spectrum Crap Games Competition begins. The inaugural winner is *Anthea Turner's National Lottery Simulator*. Sony releases the *Help* charity compilation on the PlayStation in aid of various children's charities.

2009
■ Starting with *God Of War*, HD collections steadily rise in popularity, giving gamers the chance to play previous generation classics with a spangly new sheen.

2013
■ Capcom announces its *Capcom Essentials* compilation, which includes recent games such as *Resident Evil 6* and *Devil May Cry 4*.



» Budget compilations were inevitable in the late Eighties.



» Beau Jolly's swansong: *20 Giant PC Games*.

TAITO COIN-OP HITS

1988, £12.95, IMAGINE

■ The Ocean-owned Imagine label had garnered a variable record over the years, but its success at converting the cream of Taito's coin-ops was admirable. This collection contained six games by Imagine of which *Renegade* and the two *Arkanoid* games were a particular highlight. Add the Firebird conversions of vertical shoot-'em-up *Flying Shark* and the cutesy *Bubble Bobble* and you had a collection well worth a tenner of anyone's money. The Spectrum release just edges it for its overall consistency.



THALAMUS: THE HITS

1988, £12.95, THALAMUS

■ The software arm of magazine publisher Newsfield, Thalamus created a string of critically successful in-house and third-party products on the C64. Games such as *Sanxion*, *Delta* and *Armalyte* had already proved that, when it came to scrolling shoot-'em-ups, the Commodore 64 had no peer. Mix in the platform-adventure *Hawkeye*, original puzzle game *Que-Dex* and Martin Walker's multi-scrolling *Hunter's Moon* and you had a compilation that would impress even the most ardent Spectrum fan. Maybe.



MEGA GAMES 2

1993, £N/A, SEGA

■ When it came to cartridge systems, compilations were less common. Whether it be the cost of assembling games or licensing issues, there simply wasn't the variety or value associated with the computer compilations. However, *Mega Games 2* bucked this trend by including three outstanding games that became a primer for new Mega Drive owners (it was included with new consoles). Faithful, if reduced, arcade conversion *Golden Axe* rubbed shoulders with the original *Streets Of Rage* and *Revenge Of Shinobi* to create a superb collection.



SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

1993, £49.95, NINTENDO

■ Designed to show off the Super Nintendo's capabilities, Nintendo took the unusual approach of releasing four of Mario and Luigi's earlier adventures in this one cartridge. Alongside the original *Super Mario Bros* sat its sequels, all enhanced graphically and sonically, although in general the gameplay of each title remained the same. *Super Mario All-Stars* was a best-seller as the old NES games were given a spit and polish, ready to be introduced to new and old Nintendo fans alike.



"I remember looking at the compilations that were out there and realising we needed a hook"
Gremlin Graphics's Ian Stewart

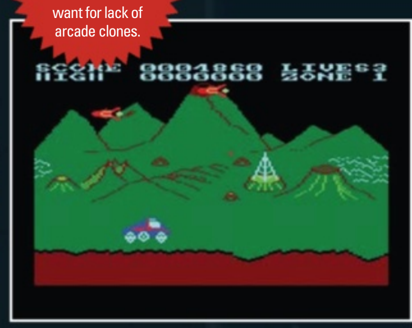


» Beau Jolly's *Mega Hits* was an action-orientated companion to *10 Computer Hits*.

But for one person, it meant an opportunity to not only sell games, but also to make money for a good cause. "Having been caught up in the emotion of the Ethiopian Famine Appeal, the idea of *SoftAid* was conceived as a value-added pack which was a win-win for both the consumer and the cause," explains Rod Cousens, "and we decided to route it through BandAid, although it was purely a voluntary contributor." With the official endorsement of Sir Bob Geldof and help from *Computer Trade Weekly*'s Greg Ingham, Rod rallied support for *SoftAid*. "The software industry then was a close-knit community, so I called around and asked publishers and developers to donate a strong title." Rod's Quicksilva led the way by donating one of its own bigger games (*Ant Attack*) and nine other software houses contributed games free of charge; retailers took no margin, magazines published adverts at no charge and the evocative artwork was created by an artist friend of Rod's named David Rowe who had already made a name for himself within the industry. "The only costs were the actual cost of manufacturing and the delivery charges," says Rod proudly.

With an attractive price point of just £4.99, *SoftAid* was a huge success, topping the Gallup charts for many months and accruing valuable funds for the famine appeal. "It didn't actually take that much effort to make it happen," notes Rod modestly, "as there was an incredible willingness from people to help wherever they could." *SoftAid*'s success reverberated around the rest of the software industry. The record companies had pioneered the concept ▶

» [Amstrad] Beau Jolly's *10 Computer Hits 2* on the Amstrad did not want for lack of arcade clones.







» With limited cart capacities, Retro compilations began on consoles such as the Sega Mega Drive.

MODERN HITS

We reveal some of our favourite modern releases

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

2003, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC



■ As a combination of previous releases, *Midway Arcade Treasures* didn't significantly offer anything more other than the sheer number of iconic games: *Defender, Gauntlet, Paperboy, Spy Hunter, Robotron 2084*… the list goes on.

ATARI ANTHOLOGY

2003, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, PC



■ This compilation included 18 classic arcade games such as *Asteroids, Battlezone, Centipede* and *Missile Command*. 67 Atari 2600 games such as *Gravitar, Yar's Revenge* and *Warlords*. Amazing value for any retro-head with a PS2 or Xbox.

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

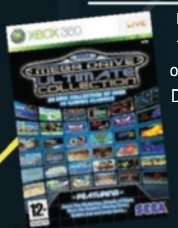
2005, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX



■ With 22 great games included, *Capcom Classics* was never going to leave you short of gaming time. But when you consider it included arcade behemoths such as *1942, Bionic Commando, Final Fight* and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* just for starters…

SEGA MEGA DRIVE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

2009, PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360



■ Rated 98 per cent in **Retro Gamer**, this compilation contains 48 of some of the finest games to grace the Mega Drive. Trilogy sets of *Sonic, Streets Of Rage* and *Golden Axe* sit alongside RPGs such as *Shining Force* and off-beat hits *Comix Zone* and *Ristar*. An outstanding assembly of games.

LOST TREASURES OF INFOCOM

2012, iOS

■ This 2012 iOS release compiles Infocom's most famous games, giving gamers the chance to experience once again magnificent adventures such as *Zork, The Lurking Horror* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.



▶ of compilations with previously-released games – *SoftAid* had taken the idea and turned it into a chart phenomenon.

Ian Stewart, head of Gremlin Graphics, recalls the effect on the market. "I remember looking at the compilations that were out there and realising we needed one, and we needed a hook. At that time Newsfield were massive, so we spoke to them and agreed that we would use their top game accolades." Gremlin released *4 Crash Smashes* and *4 Zzap! Sizzlers* in 1986 to predictable acclaim and success – the tapes were naturally laden with bonafide classics. Meanwhile, Gremlin's rivals were also getting in on the act. Manchester's Ocean Software had a hook of its own with the *They Sold A Million* tagline; accompanying *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, were the smash hits *Beach Head, Jet Set Willy* and *Sabre Wulf* (with *Staff Of Karnath* replacing the latter on the C64 version). Fellow giant US Gold also showed its hand with the *Arcade Hall Of Fame*, featuring *Hunchback II: Quasimodo's Revenge* in addition to three of its own games. With Elite Systems releasing the first of its Hit-Pak range for Christmas 1986, the age of the compilation had truly arrived, although strangely one facet of these collections had remained oddly modest. This was about to dramatically change.



» [PC] *Half Life 2*, one of the many quality games offered by Valve in *The Orange Box*.

> "There was a tipping point when games have sold so well that everyone already has them or has already played them"
>
> US Gold's Tim Chaney

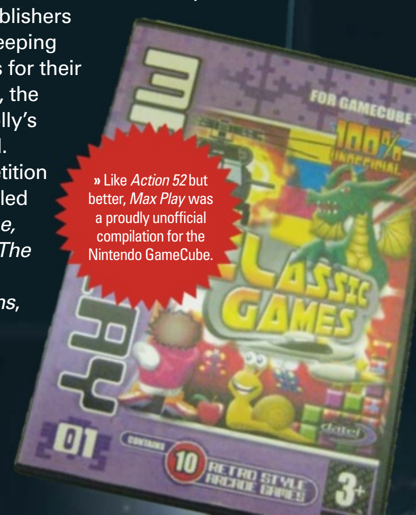
Until 1987, most publishers had used the industry-standard single or double cassette boxes. "It became like chocolate box syndrome," says Ian Stewart. "You were going out, predominantly at Christmas time, to attract people to buy and the games were the hook – but a big box made the compilation even more attractive." Tim Chaney, managing director of US Gold who, in 1986, released the first of several Gold Collections contained within large plastic boxes, told us: "It was all about retail impact and differentiation – getting noticed on the shelf." But, as noticeable as the sleek Gold Collections were, Ocean would soon trump all with what many view to be the ultimate classic compilation: *The Magnificent Seven*.

Ocean Software had already released a brace of collections that were mainly sold as pack-ins with new computer bundles, and Christmas 1987 saw an incredible release schedule for the self-styled 'Kings of the Compilation'. Utilising the large cardboard boxes that would soon become synonymous with compilations, Ocean released a sports-themed set called *Game, Set And Match*; the action-orientated *Live Ammo* and, of course, *The Magnificent Seven*. For once the hyperbole was accurate: Ocean really was the market leader when it came to compilations.

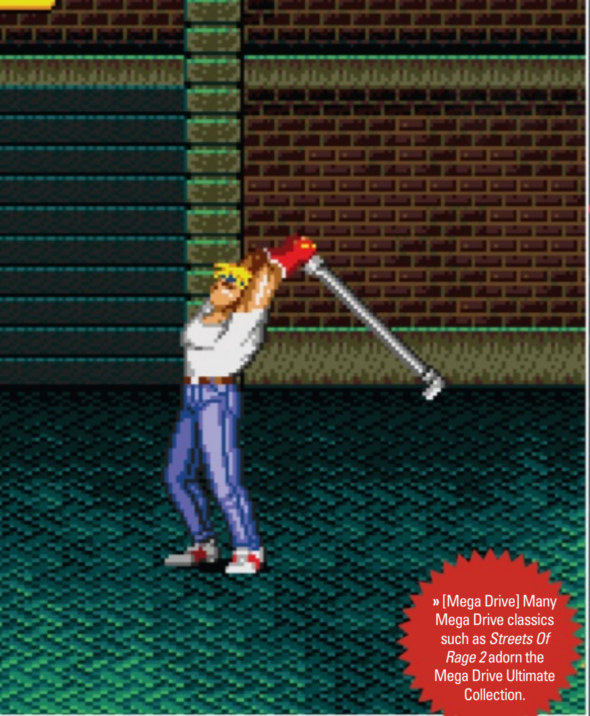
Ocean's triumph in the winter of 1987 had been preceded by a compilation that harked back to the early days. Elite Systems' *Trio* followed in the wake of sub-label Hit-Pak's first two compilations that had showcased the best of Elite mixed in with a handful of third-party games. Crucially, *6-Pak Volume One* had included *Duet*, a *Commando* update not deemed suitable for solo release. With this in mind, Elite released *Trio* which, as the name suggested, contained three games all glowingly proclaimed as new and unreleased. *Trio* was a moderate success for Hit-Pak but probably got lost among Elite's constant releases at the end of 1987, and was certainly not helped by the mediocrity of the included games.

Compilations and budget games were quickly taking over the computer game industry. As Ian Stewart explains: "As a software house you could only churn out so many individual products a year. Compilations allowed you to easily get more products out there, especially at a key time such as Christmas." But for publishers such as Beau Jolly, that developed no software of its own, the popularity of compilations began making it difficult to acquire better and recent games for its own collections. With many licensed properties and publishers understandably keeping their best releases for their own compilations, the quality of Beau Jolly's collections dipped.

By 1988, competition was fierce. Ocean led the way with *Game, Set And Match 2, The In Crowd* and *We Are The Champions*,



» Like *Action 52* but better, *Max Play* was a proudly unofficial compilation for the Nintendo GameCube.



» [Mega Drive] Many Mega Drive classics such as *Streets Of Rage 2* adorn the Mega Drive Ultimate Collection.

all cunningly re-using catchy phrases. Gremlin re-released virtually all of its back-catalogue over the year, and US Gold's *History In The Making* was a luxury compendium of 15 games that retailed for a pocket-money busting £24.99, with US Gold making a bold statement thanks to a gloriously laminated double-depth box. Having also acquired Ultimate, US Gold assembled the best of its games in *The Collected Works*, although Tim Chaney admits it perhaps wasn't as successful as you'd imagine. "There was a tipping point when games have sold so well that everyone already has them or has already played them. So you ask, who is the consumer going to be?"

Although the former US Gold MD has hinted above at a reason why compilations began to fade on the 8-bits, it doesn't explain their general demise. Perhaps it was the increased size of development teams at the beginning of the 16-bit era and the associated rise in the cost of acquiring third-party games; or maybe because it was an industry that now recognised the value of its own IP and how to exploit it long-term. Compilations did still appear on the 16-bit computers, but with the advent of the CD, the PC became the next battleground. This resulted in efforts such as Topware's *Gold Games* collecting an amazing 43 games, while Beau Jolly released a 20 game PC compilation as its swansong in 1997.



Home consoles were beginning to dominate again. Such dedicated machines normally required expensive licences to publish games, and cartridge systems did not allow for multiple games unless they were cheap, basic titles such as the infamous *Action 52*, or retro such as *Arcade's Greatest Hits* on the Sega Mega Drive. Filler titles could no longer be cheap old games to pad a compilation's number count; they would often be just as expensive as the tent-pole games. The advent of CD consoles did little to change this, although there were notable exceptions such as the PlayStation charity compilation *Help* and the Sega Saturn's *Sega Ages* collection. And as the new millennium dawned and retro gaming became more fashionable, collections of old arcade games became the new compilation, breathing life into a forgotten genre.

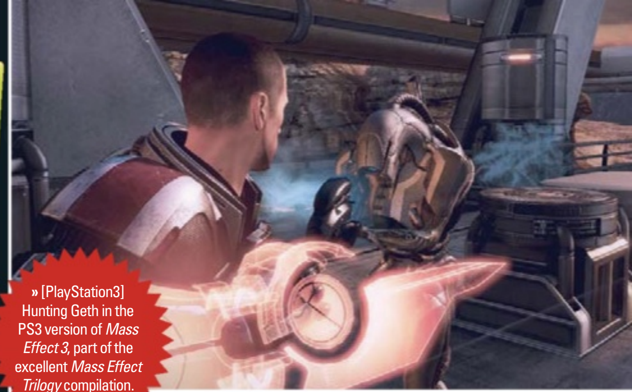
Today, digital distribution is giving developers and publishers the chance once again to cheaply re-release games. Leading the way is Humble Bundle, a highly successful series of pay-what-you-like collections of largely independent games. As we write, however, its latest compilation compiles some of the biggest names of the current generation such as *Dead Space*, *Mirror's Edge* and *Battlefield*. Even better, the recently-announced *Capcom Essentials*, containing games such as *Resident Evil 6*, *Dead Rising 2* and *Street Fighter IV*, looks set to revive the classic compilation at a time when the second-hand games market and mass emulation almost totally negates the need for them. So, on the surface it would appear that the videogame compilation is far from dead. Although, as **Retro Gamer** sadly notes, our nostalgia for the classic era of the Eighties, when large boxes appeared under our Christmas trees, is unlikely to be replicated any time soon with downloadable collections. No matter – we'll always have our chocolate box memories.

Special thanks to Ian Stewart, Neil Palmer, Tim Chaney and Rod Cousens. Thanks also to Paul Fogarty, Graham Richards, Jan Baart, Trevor Nock, Terry Williams and Jon Bevan for kindly supplying images.

FLYING THE FLAG: HUMBLE BUNDLE

How compilations went digital

Humble Bundle is the brainchild of Jeffrey Rosen and John Graham who, when part of indie developer Wolfire, created the Organic Indie Pre-order Pack. The concept of this pack was simple: all money from sales would go directly to the developers with no outside distributor required. The success of Organic led them to create Humble Bundle, but were they fans of classic compilations? "One of my favourite purchases back in the day was a LucasArts adventure pack for the Mac," remembers Jeffrey with a smile, "and it came in an awesome box which was kinda shaped like an hourglass." How does Jeffrey think that Humble Bundle has affected the industry? "The video market is incredibly huge. I think we are still too small to have any large macro effect on the industry, but so far all the signs point to indie games containing to flourish instead of collapsing. You often get indie games going toe-to-toe with triple-A releases, which is a great sign." Talking of triple-A, the latest Humble Bundle is full of them, boasting best-sellers from series such as *Dead Space* and *Burnout*. It seems the future for Humble Bundle remains bright. At the time of writing, *Humble Origin Bundle* has sold over 2 million bundles. All proceeds from these sales go to numerous charities such as GamesAid and The Human Rights Campaign.



» [PlayStation3] Hunting Geth in the PS3 version of *Mass Effect 3*, part of the excellent *Mass Effect Trilogy* compilation.

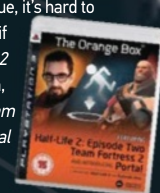
STILL BEATING

The best examples of current-gen compilations

THE ORANGE BOX

2007, PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC

■ When it comes to all round value, it's hard to beat Valve's *The Orange Box*. As if the re-released games *Half-Life 2* and *Episode One* weren't enough, new updates in *Episode Two*, *Team Fortress 2* and the fantastic *Portal* sealed the deal.



METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION

2012, PLAYSTATION 3, PS VITA, XBOX 360

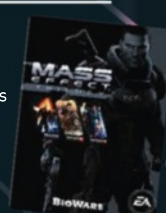
■ The recent *Metal Gear Solid* games have been a leading light of the stealth genre and this collection assembles all the HD remakes of the PS2 and current-gen outings. Great value, but the omission of the PlayStation original is disappointing.



MASS EFFECT TRILOGY

2012, PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC

■ Bioware's *Mass Effect* series has slowly evolved from its moderately complex roots into a lean, muscular RPG-shooter. This special pack collects all three games in the series and offers potentially hours and hours of Shepard-related hi-jinks.



COMMAND AND CONQUER ULTIMATE COLLECTION

2012, PC

■ Westwood's *C&C* quickly established itself in the mid-to-late Nineties as the premier action-strategy series on the PC. This amazing collection contains 17 years' worth of war-mongering and countless weeks of gaming action, both single and multiplayer.



HUMBLE ORIGIN BUNDLE

2013, PC

■ While the mainly indie games that Humble Bundle has so far included have generally been excellent, Humble Bundle Origin raised the stakes considerably by including well-known triple-A titles such as *Dead Space 3*, *Burnout Paradise* and *Mirror's Edge*.



ENGLISH SOFTWARE

A VERY BRITISH AFFAIR

As one of the biggest publishers for Atari home computers, English Software carved a profitable niche among UK-based videogame developers. Mike Bevan discovers how the company gained such a strong following with the Atari crowd, and beyond

Picture a little cottage in the country, complete with pretty flower borders and a rustic garden gate. Not something you'd imagine would have much to do with computer games, unless perhaps you were playing *Hover Bovver*. But it was this very image that attracted a number of budding game programmers to a new software house with a mysterious air of Old World charm.

"It was a black and white advert in *Computer & Video Games*," says Simon Hunt, designer of *Diamonds* and *Dan Strikes Back*. "It had a picture of a cottage with a rose on it and it was saying they were looking for software authors to write games. I was 19 at the time, and I'd already written a version of *Diamonds* in Atari BASIC for *C&VG*, and when English Software said they were interested I had to write to *C&VG* to say please don't publish it as I didn't want to give away the idea… So my dad drove me up to Manchester from Bedfordshire and I showed them my work in progress – how I was converting *Diamonds* from BASIC to assembler language – and they said 'yeah this is brilliant, if you can develop it we'd definitely like to sell it.' That was Philip and his brother Ralph."

"I wanted a name that would appeal to the US games market," explains Philip Morris, English Software's founder. "I started at a computer chess retailer in October 1977 called Gemini Electronics, based in Newton Street in Piccadilly. It was the first independent Atari VCS and later Atari 400/800/CBM 64 retailer in Manchester. After a while I stopped retailing because I was being approached all the time by other Atari programmers, so I moved to an office to work on games full-time. We were based in Parsonage Gardens, off Deansgate. I personally play-tested every game and came up with the packaging designs, using outside companies to do the artwork."

"That was his decision for using the little cottage with the garden as the motif," adds Simon, "because he said that Americans would go for that quaint, English thing…" And they did, to a point, with several English Software titles making it to the States, including *Airstrike*, *Jet-Boot Jack* and *Elektra Glide*. The decision early on to fully support

IN THE KNOW

- The English Software Company was founded by Manchester-based computer retailer Philip Morris. With a history of specialising in Atari hardware, Philip decided to support these machines with games software by publishing programs sent in by budding authors. Trading as the 'UK's premier Atari software house,' with a large catalogue of Atari 400/800 games titles, the company also released exclusive games or ports for the C64, Amstrad CPC, Commodore 16, BBC Micro, Sinclair Spectrum and Acorn Electron. Two titles, *Leviathan* and *QBall*, were also released on the Amiga and Atari ST.

- Popular products by English Software include *Jet-Boot Jack*, *Airstrike II*, *Henry's House*, *Elektra Glide*, *Knight Games*, and *Leviathan*. Several ESC games also made it to the United States after US-based publisher Datamost offered to distribute *Airstrike* and *Jet-Boot Jack*. Mastertronic later published titles like *Knight Games* there.

- A lot of English Software's freelance programmers made a decent wedge of cash from their games, if not exactly a fortune. Steve Riding's Airstrike games made him enough to pay off half of his first house, while Simon Hunt's Diamonds earned him the money to buy his first car, although he tells us it was second-hand…



» [C64] *Octapolis* was one of the last games released and was a Commodore 64 exclusive.

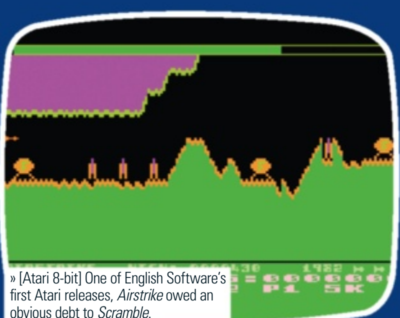
> "I personally felt that the Atari computer was the most sophisticated at the time"
> PHILIP MORRIS

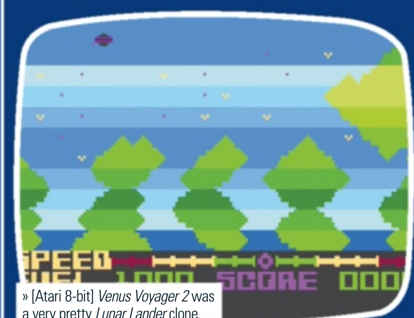
the Atari home computers was also something that may have appealed in the US. And although the Anglophile theme wasn't necessarily reflected in all the games, at least a few, including *Henry's House*, *Knight Games* and *The Adventures Of Robin Hood*, were certainly inspired by romantic visions of medieval England and baby royal princes. Although ironically, in a time when most games publishers were supporting Clive Sinclair's machines, English Software had their eyes firmly on the all-American Atari above the home-grown systems.

"I personally felt the Atari computer was the most sophisticated at the time to produce games for," says Philip. "But the big money was being made by the Spectrum companies… There was no money for in-house staff, it was always freelance programmers submitting nearly finished games, or working to my briefs and game designs. I personally evaluated all the games that were finally published; some were really great, some truly awful – not at all uncommon in those days. Game ideas were varied, some totally original and some direct copies of other games, for instance *Airstrike* and *Scramble*."

"My brother bought an Atari 400 from Phil's shop in Manchester," remembers *Airstrike*'s programmer, Steve Riding. "I started doing simple games on it, and Phil had this crazy idea of selling them. The first game was *Cosmic Conflict*, which was a mixture of BASIC and 6502. After that, Phil managed to get an Atari Assembler Cartridge and that's when *Airstrike* began. I guess it came as a result of experimenting with the hardware and then working out how the scroll registers worked. Initially I coded an editor to map out the levels. A little later I thought 'what would happen if I looked at the same data in hi-res?' That's where the radar at the bottom of the screen [in *Airstrike II*] came from. Soon afterwards, I quit university to do games."

Like Phil, Steve felt that the Atari machines were a superior games platform, despite their high cost compared to the Spectrum. "Because of its console background the Atari had a lot of excellent arcade conversions which showed what could be achieved," he says. "And there were a few more contributing factors that opened up the Ataris for me. Firstly, in a moment of inspiration, Atari had published the listing of their operating system, which gave great insight into the workings of the machine. At the same time, *Byte* magazine published monthly articles on coding the Atari hardware which was super helpful. Because of this we may lay claim to the first 'arcade quaity 100 per cent machine code games' developed in Europe…"


» [Atari 8-bit] One of English Software's first Atari releases, *Airstrike* owed an obvious debt to *Scramble*.



» [Atari 8-bit] *Venus Voyager 2* was a very pretty *Lunar Lander* clone.

ATARI SMASH HITS

Jon Williams's technical expertise with the Atari 800 led to some nifty utility programs. "One of the first things I wrote was a system to enhance the cassette features as they were a step back from the PET's," he says. "This became ACE (Atari Cassette Enhancer) which was sold by English Software. I then started work on a system to enable multiple games to be stored onto a single disk called MultiBoot. I gave it to a few friends and soon found that it had spread widely."

The MultiBoot system ended up being used on seven Atari 400/800 game compilations, three of which featured *Jet-Boot Jack*. "That was our response to the US Atari game *Miner 2049er*," says Philip. Some of the later compilations contained products from other companies like Synapse Software's *Blue Max*, and *Alley Cat*. "I also licensed games from Geoff Brown at US Gold to make up the *Atari Smash Hits* range," Philip explains. "CentreSoft took over distribution in the mid-Eighties for all the English Software titles. Geoff also programmed *Word Olympics* and *Maths Marathon*, two of the first educational games for the Atari."



DEFINING GAMES

DIAMONDS



Although the Atari had a version of *Dig Dug*, we'd say *Diamonds* was the better game. It's faster, with Digger Dan zipping around the screen grabbing those elusive gems, and there's a strategic element – dig away too much earth and you'll find yourself stuck. This rule can also be used to trap your enemy, Brian the Blob.

JET-BOOT JACK



This was English Software's signature title, appearing on several of its *Atari Smash Hits* compilations as well as many other platforms. Jack's nippy boots give it a thrilling pace, and grabbing vinyl while dodging stalactites and squashing nasties is great fun. Jack returned in *The Legend Of The Knucker-Hole*, which even features a dragon…

HENRY'S HOUSE



According to Phil, *Henry's House* could be one of the only games that Prince Charles might have had a bash on. While the C64 version came out first, the Atari version – released by Mastertronic – is superior. It's better looking, and Henry's jump has been tweaked so that he can clear hazards much more easily. We hate that toothbrush though.

ELEKTRA GLIDE



Adam Billyard's futuristic driving game wasn't a great deal to do with any particular Harley Davidson motorbike, but it was certainly a stunning technical achievement. It's a seat-of-the-pants thrill-ride which shifts at monumental speed, throwing tunnels and scary geometric obstacles at you, all to a stonking David Whittaker soundtrack.

KNIGHT GAMES



One of a handful of ESC games with a truly English flavour, *Knight Games* was to medieval combat what Epyx's *Games* series was to the Olympics. While most events featured knights bashing each other with swords, axes and ball-and-chains, those with more peaceful leanings could also try their hand at crossbow-shooting and archery.



» [Atari 8-bit] *Captain Sticky's Gold* was written by *Airstrike*'s Steve Riding.



» [Atari 8-bit] *Neptune's Daughters* – a lovely idea let down by being way too short.

"I loved coding for the Atari, even though by today's standards it seems pretty primitive. At the time it was so elegant. Phil was a great guy to work for – he loaned me the development kit including a floppy disk drive as I had been using tapes before then which wasn't ideal. I have to say I thought it was fantastic when I started to make enough money to rent a big house and live with lots of my friends, and if I needed any money I would just do another game. Initially I would also work in Phil's shop at the weekend, so I got to interact with lots of the potential buyers, which was great."

Airstrike was popular enough to spawn a sequel, as was Simon Hunt's subterranean earth-mover *Diamonds*. It was a hectic arcade-style game where players dug through earth and attempted to squash nasties with boulders while grabbing sparkling gems. "Despite what you might assume, I had never played *Dig Dug*, although I might have seen it once in an arcade," says Simon. "I was more aware of *Pac-Man* and Spectrum games like *Manic Miner* and *Sabre Wulf*. This was pre-*Boulder Dash*," he notes mischievously, "in fact I like to think that maybe *Boulder Dash* might have been influenced by seeing my game!

"Philip decided that it would be a cool marketing idea to offer some kind of prize so we thought about it and he came up with the idea of getting a plaque made with a real diamond embedded in it. So we decided to make it a competition. If you could complete the 64th level the screen would show this picture of a diamond, and you had to take a Polaroid and send it in. It felt like there must have been 50 or 60 kids that had sent in a picture… Philip invited me up to the ESC offices after the close date of the competition and gave me this big envelope of letters and I had to sort through all the entrants to find the highest score. I know the guy that won it lived in Wales, but I've no idea where it would be now…"





Simon followed *Diamonds* with *Dan Strikes Back*, where Digger Dan returned in a scrolling adventure featuring more precious stones and mushrooms. "Another ESC game, *Firefleet*, had vertical scrolling and was a kind of contemporary for Atari's *Caverns Of Mars*. I really liked the vertical scrolling idea, and the levels with the mushrooms on the floors were inspired by the dot-collecting of *Pac-Man* and *Bounty Bob*. I wanted to have sections that you unlocked as you went down, and *Dan Strikes Back* was more of a puzzle game



© Atarimania

» [Atari 8-bit] Jet-Boot Jack oozing style with his headphones and rocket-powered footwear.



» [Atari 8-bit] *Firefleet* was ESC's answer to *Caverns Of Mars*, and featured cool *Robotron*-style explosions.



» The distinctive cobalt blue of English Software's packaging.

in that you had to work out how to open the doors on each level.

Simon also reveals, "I had plans for a third game called *Return Of The Fungi*, where Digger Dan would have been in the centre of the screen surrounded by a forcefield and Brian the Blob would be running around the outside firing toadstools at you, which would land and break into spores you had to avoid or blow up with bombs. I had planned the spores to behave like *Missile Command* with the way the explosions bloomed and blossomed. Unfortunately I never did more than a title screen."

Perhaps English Software's most popular Atari release was *Jet-Boot Jack*, which was programmed by Jon Williams. It was while working as a TV and radio repair engineer that Jon had first dabbled with games programming on the Commodore PET. After writing a dice-based game and getting it published by Petsoft, he had found that his royalty payment had come to the grand sum of exactly two pounds. Moving to the Atari suddenly seemed like a very good idea.

"My initial interest in the Atari was a technical one," Jon tells us. "There were a number of local people who would write short 'demo' programs that did nothing more than make you go 'Ooh! I wonder how he's done that?' As I got more into the Atari 800 hardware I started playing around with a game that used the system in an efficient way, and this eventually evolved into *Jet-Boot Jack*. The game wasn't really based on anything else, just the usual scenario of collecting items to complete a level. I guess I was writing it for a year or so before sending it off to English Software to see if they'd be interested in marketing it."

"I chose English Software as they were marketing games for the Atari that I could relate to, so I thought they'd be the perfect publisher. Phil Morris contacted me and said they'd like to release the game but asked for a few changes to be made. I seem to remember it was Phil's idea to add the Walkman-style headphones and make Jack collect musical notes. Sony's Walkman became big in the early Eighties so it was perfect timing. The game took a few months to complete and I had to write some code to compress the data so it would run on the Atari 400 as well as the 800."

"Jack's jet boots came about mainly because of the quirky Atari hardware," Jon explains. "I was always trying to use the player-missile (sprite) graphics as efficiently as possible and came up ▶

> **"Maybe Boulder Dash might have been influenced by seeing my game"**
> SIMON HUNT



» [Atari 8-bit] Castaway on a barren planet in the graphic adventure *Stranded*.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Philip Morris



"English Software was the start of the games industry which led to me producing music and voice actors in studios, right up to the present," says Philip. As an audio producer, Philip worked on projects like *Colony Wars* and the *Formula 1* series. His credits include voice casting and production for several *Tomb Raider* games and the *Total War* series. Philip is currently involved in games localisation and translation.

Simon Hunt



"I'm working for Hewlett Packard as a software engineer," says Simon. "I went to Surrey University, got my degree in information systems, then got employed by HP in Surrey and I've been working with them ever since. I moved to California in 1997, met a girl and she sponsored my green card. We're now married, and about two years ago I became a US citizen. My daughter is now 13, about to start high school, and I feel very old!"

Steve Riding

While the *Airstrike* games were very profitable for Steve, he made an unusual career choice after his period coding for English Software. "I joined Imagine to work on an Atari *Olympics* game," he says. "Ironically that was one of the shortest periods of employment ever for me…" Steve soon fell on his feet, joining Psygnosis, producing games like *Leander*, *Agony*, and *Formula 1* – on which he worked with Phil again. He's currently studio director at Lockwood Studios.

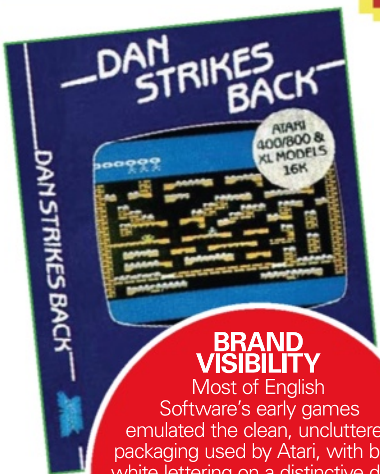
Jon Williams



"After the demise of English Software I continued as a freelance programmer for many years, until I was coerced into going in-house with Eurocom Software in Derby," Jon tells us. "During my time at Eurocom I came into contact with Phil again when he was running an audio sub-contracting company and then managing localisation for games. Sadly, Eurocom went into administration at the end of 2012. I've now taken early retirement but hope to go back to my roots and do some home programming for phones and tablets."









CATALOGUE VARIETY

ESC was an extremely prolific publisher on the Atari machines, and the range of products offered by the company meant that there was always something exciting to tempt potential buyers. From simple arcade clones like *Airstrike* and *Duellin' Droids* to platformers, racers, adventure games, Tarot Card simulations and educational packages – English Software had it covered.

BRAND VISIBILITY

Most of English Software's early games emulated the clean, uncluttered packaging used by Atari, with bold white lettering on a distinctive dark blue background that really stood out on computer store shelves. Magazine adverts made use of the same styling, and readers came to associate the colour with the ESC brand.



THE DNA OF... ENGLISH SOFTWARE



FREELANCE POOL

Many of English Software's freelance programmers released a number of games through the company. Regulars included Steve Riding, Jon Williams, Dave Woodhouse and Tim Huntington. Philip Morris would also suggest game ideas for programmers to develop, most notably *Leviathan* and *Knight Games*.

I ♥ ATARI

While a niche market compared to the Spectrum or the emerging Commodore 64, English Software embraced the 8-bit Atari computer platforms more than any other British developer, and gained a devoted following from its user base as a result.

TECHNICAL AMBITION

Slick programming and technical know-how meant English software was producing fast, 100 per cent machine code titles for the Atari systems before anyone else in the European market – *Airstrike 1* & *2*, *Firefleet*, *Diamonds* and *Jet-Boot Jack* being prime examples. Later games such as *Henry's House*, *Elektra Glide*, *QBall*, and *Leviathan* pushed the graphical limitations of their systems and looked great.





▶ with the idea of using them for the jets along the ground and enemies in other areas. Once I'd got the idea of a character using jet boots, the name followed. Everything else dropped into place. The game was released in 1983 and sold really well, which was a relief after the failings on the PET!" Its popularity meant *Jet-Boot Jack* was one of the most ported ESC titles, popping up on a variety of 8-bit systems including the C64, BBC Micro and Amstrad CPC.

Philip was also putting forward plenty of ideas for games for his freelance programmers, many of which ended up as full English Software releases. "My stories and game designs included *Mediator*, *WitchSwitch*, *Leviathan*, *Knight Games*, *Hijack* and *The Adventures Of Robin Hood*," he tells us. As Philip freely admits, the quantity of games being put out by the company meant there were a fair few duffers. Undersea adventure *Neptune's Daughters* was one, being far too short and easy to complete. "It was a good story I feel, but a very basic game," he agrees.

Kissin' Cousins, a *Pitfall*-style platformer, suffered from being ridiculously hard, despite its impressive aural qualities. "That could have been the very first game to feature sampled speech played back without any additional hardware, with my voice pitched up going 'save me'," chuckles Philip. *Krazy Kopter*, a simple helicopter rescue game, was also too difficult due to an over-zealous enemy missile that would instantly blast you out of the sky. After negative press reviews, ESC ended up offering an updated, easier version to customers. Philip's judgment at assessing products also let him down badly on one notable occasion. "I turned down the amazing *Dropzone* by Archer MacLean because it was too close to *Defender*," he admits sheepishly. "Big mistake, and then US Gold took it on and did really well with it!"

By this point ESC's original American distributor, Datamost, had gone out of business. "After that, there was not a lot of interest from the US for the Atari



» [Atari 8-bit] A night on the town in *The Adventures Of Robin Hood*.



» [C64] In *Henry's House*, even the teddies are out to get you.

"I sent a copy to Prince Charles and was pleased to receive an acknowledgment"

PHILIP MORRIS

titles," laments Philip. Budget publisher Mastertronic began distributing several ESC games in the UK, and later the US. One great title that could be snapped up for a few quid was *Henry's House*, a colourful platform game inspired by the birth of the latest royal. It was one of the first ESC games to be developed initially for the C64, while a superior Atari version followed shortly after. "*Henry's House* was originally called *Home Sweet Home*," says author Chris Murray. "English Software wanted to take advantage of the fact Charles and Di had just had Prince Harry so they renamed it."

"I sent a copy to Prince Charles and was pleased to receive an acknowledgement," says Philip. Chris notes that, while the full-priced C64 version did well, it was the budget Atari release that flew off the shelves. "I got about £500-£1,000 a month for over a year, crazy numbers," he reveals. "I made a lot more from the cheap version despite getting ten pence – ten times less than the C64 version – a unit."

One of English Software's last big hurrahs on the Atari platforms was *Elektra Glide*. "That was Adam Billyard's crowning achievement," says Philip. "It was the first home computer racing game with real tunnels and a morphing title sequence." In its various incarnations, including versions for the Amstrad and C64, the game shifted around 40 to 50,000 units. Adam went on to program a kung-fu game called *Chop Suey*, and the inventive floating 3D pool simulation *QBall*.

For the sequel to *Jet-Boot Jack*, Jon decided it was time to move to another platform, although he still kept some use for his beloved Atari. "The 64 was becoming the leader in the battle of the 6502 machines, so I decided to write the game for C64 only," he explains. "I developed a system that allowed me to continue writing games using the Atari 800, sending the code to the C64 using the Atari joystick ports and the Commodore's parallel port." Jack's new outing, *The Legend Of The Knucker-Hole*, was inspired by a tale from Lyminster, near Jon's Sussex home. "It was a nod to the local myth that the Knuckerhole was a bottomless waterhole inhabited by a dragon," says Jon. "I never did see one though…"

Jon's next C64 game also took a leaf from English tales of yore. "Phil came up with the idea for *Knight Games* and asked if I'd be interested in programming it," he says.

"Everybody else was doing kung-fu games, which we did already with *Chop Suey*. I wanted a combat game to appeal to the US C64 market," adds Philip. "I researched the history of English combat through the centuries and came up with the game idea, with real 12th century medieval chivalry tunes, transcribed by a rock guitarist friend, Lynn Oakey – who used to play in Nico's band – and programmed by Dave Whittaker."





» [C64] A relaxing spot of archery in *Knight Games*.

"The game was released in 1986 and did reasonably well," says Jon. "I started work on a follow up, *Knight Games 2: Space Trilogy*. This didn't fare as well, probably as the appeal of the original version was being clad in suits of armour. With hindsight, a simple expansion of the original may have been better." While *Knight Games* is possibly ESC's most famous C64 title, others, like *Octapolis* and *Leviathan*, might bring back memories to Commodore owners. "*Leviathan* was really copied off *Zaxxon*, except you could fly both ways," admits Philip. "It was also inspired by the spaceship in ZZ Top's *Rough Boy* video. *Octapolis* was a great game, an odd combination of shoot-'em-up and platformer."

Sadly, the company's flirtation with C64 and Amiga/ST games publishing was rather short-lived. "I couldn't compete with games from Nintendo and Sega on their new consoles," admits Philip, "and decided to concentrate on managing rock bands and producing records instead." After the release of *Knight Games 2* in 1987, Philip's software label was wound down for good. But many 8-bit gamers, especially Atari owners, will be grateful for what the Manchester-based outfit – along with dozens of bedroom coders – achieved in its six years trading as The English Software Company.

TIMELINE

1982 AN ADVERT FOR GAMES AUTHORS FOR ENGLISH SOFTWARE APPEARS IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF C&VG. TWO OF ITS FIRST TITLES, AIRSTRIKE AND TIME WARP, ARE RELEASED FOR THE ATARI 400/800.

1983 AIRSTRIKE 2, DIAMONDS AND JET-BOOT JACK, THREE OF ENGLISH SOFTWARE'S MOST SUCCESSFUL EARLY ATARI GAMES, HIT STORES.

1984 SIMON HUNT COMPLETES HIS DIAMONDS SEQUEL, DAN STRIKES BACK. HENRY'S HOUSE APPEARS ON THE C64, AND IS LATER PORTED TO THE ATARI 400/800.

1985 ENGLISH SOFTWARE LAUNCHES ITS ATARI SMASH HITS COMPILATION RANGE. ELEKTRA GLIDE IS WELL-RECEIVED ON THE ATARI MACHINES.

1986 KNIGHT GAMES LAUNCHES ON THE C64. QBALL IS RELEASED FOR THE AMIGA AND ATARI ST.

1987 THE FINAL GAMES TO BE PUBLISHED UNDER THE ENGLISH SOFTWARE BANNER, LEVIATHAN, OCTAPOLIS AND KNIGHT GAMES 2, HIT RETAIL.



» [Amiga] The backgrounds for the Amiga version of *Leviathan* were created by Ste Pickford.

SNK Gals Fighters

HANDBAGS AND GLADRAGS

RETROREVIVAL



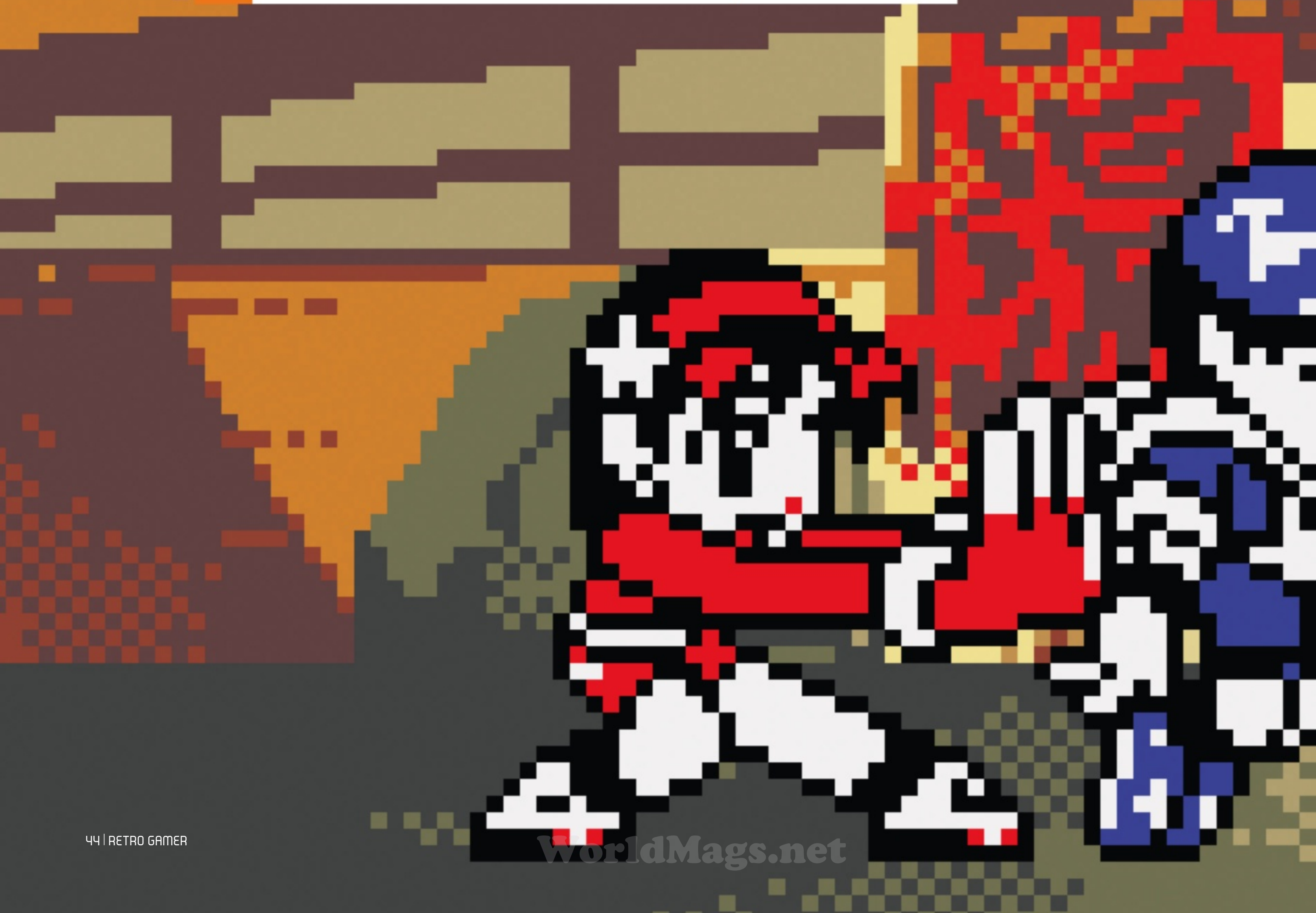
» Neo Geo Pocket Color
» SNK
» 2000

We all root for the underdog, don't we? I still remember being filled with pathos as I stared down at the Neo Geo Pocket Color languishing in the bargain bin in GameStation, looking like an abandoned puppy after Nintendo's Game Boy Color had won Best In Show. I gave it a loving home and was duly rewarded with many years of loyal entertainment in the tiny tanks of *Metal Slug* and on the lush greens of *Neo Turf Masters*.

Being an SNK console, there was a fair amount of scrapping too, with the machine offering commendable cut-down versions of *The King Of Fighters*, *Samurai Shodown* and the like. I have fondest memories for *Gals Fighters*, partly because it was a system exclusive but mainly for its overall air of irreverent weirdness.

The all-girl (plus one transvestite) roster brings together some formidable fighting femmes and plenty of silliness. The scantily-clad Mai has an impressive aerial bum-slam move, Yuri will call on her dad, Mr Karate, if you're picking on her and the mysterious Miss X can mistake you for dinner and launch a ravenous knife and fork assault.

The action is impressively fast and fairly easy to grasp, the two-button control system allowing for both weak and strong attacks according to how hard you press, and you can even battle across two handhelds with the help of a link cable. Sadly I've never been able to try out this feature, being the only Neo Geo owner in the village. Still, I'll always have my gal pals for company…







Strider

With Capcom recently revealing its plans for a brand new Strider game, Darran Jones felt the time was right to revisit the elements that made the original arcade game so thrilling to play

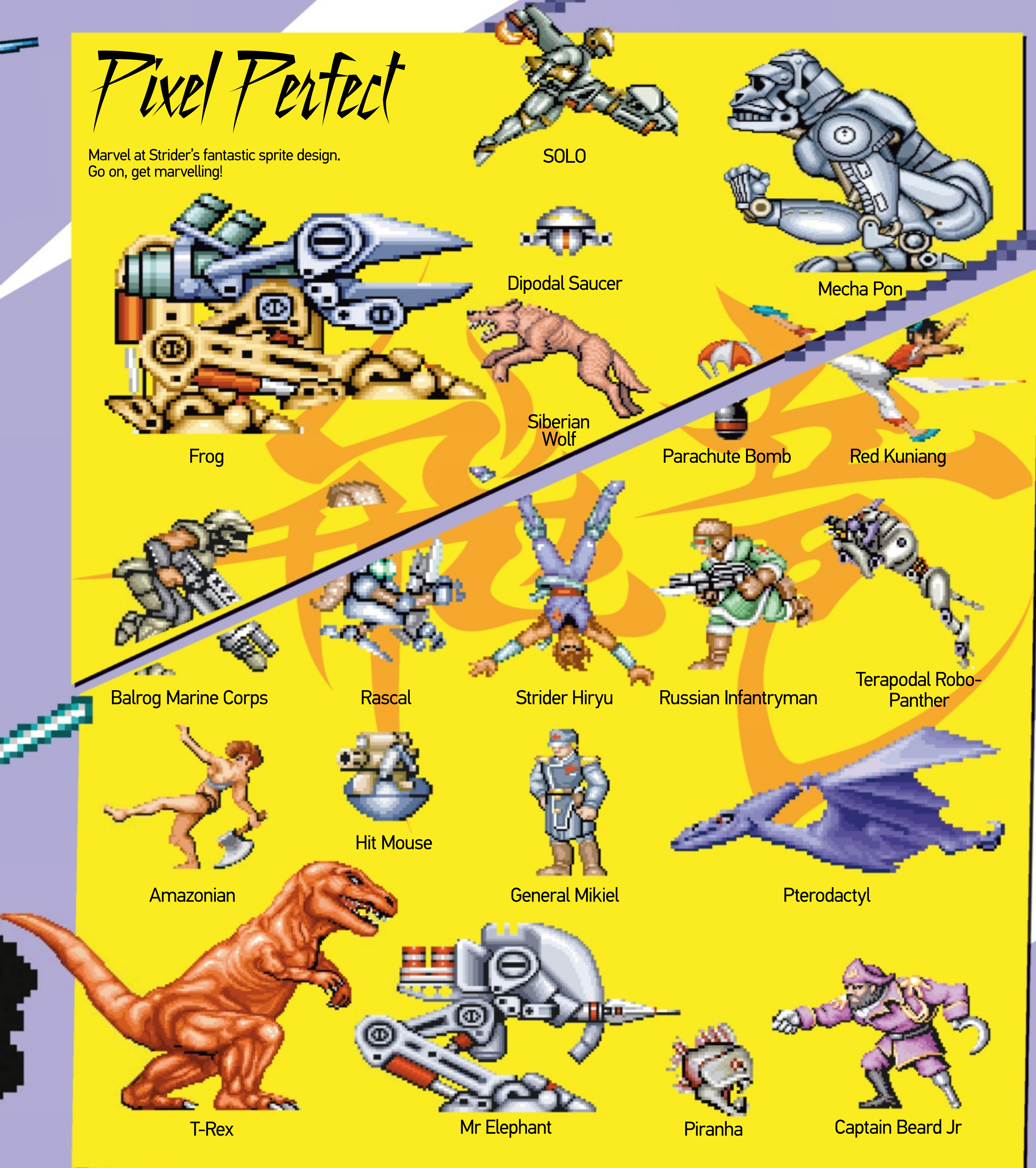
When we first heard that Capcom had decided it was time to resurrect *Strider* for a brand new generation of gamers we immediately decided to contact Kouichi 'Isuke' Yotsui, the creator of Capcom's original arcade game, mainly to see if he had any involvement in the new game. "I am not involved in this game," came his disappointed reply. "I pray for [the] activity of Capcom USA." We understand his concerns, as it's something we also shared about Double Helix Games's incoming game, although a recent interview with Capcom's James Vance in our last issue has put us at ease somewhat.

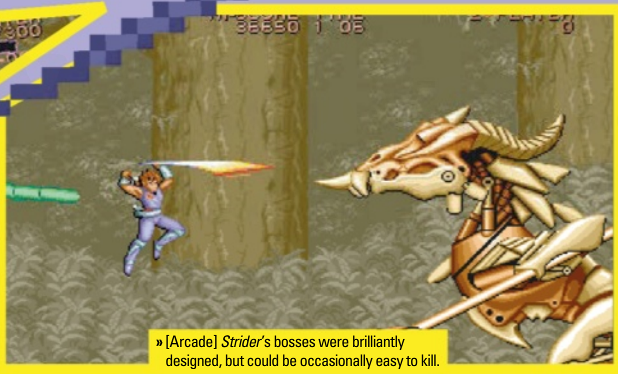
We'll never forget the first time we witnessed *Strider*. It was in Poole Quay Amusements and was housed in one of the bigger arcade cabinets there on a huge 28-inch screen. *Strider* was one of the earliest Capcom games to utilise 16-bit technology, and by goodness did it show. Everything about *Strider* was epic. Its backgrounds were brilliantly designed and featured an array of exotic locations, loosely modelled on real Eastern European countries, Siberia and the Amazon jungle; while its sprite design was superb. There was a uniqueness to *Strider*'s art design that gave it a distinctive look back in 1989 and still makes it stand out brilliantly today. It's a mysterious mish-mash of ▶



Pixel Perfect

Marvel at Strider's fantastic sprite design. Go on, get marvelling!





» [Arcade] *Strider*'s bosses were brilliantly designed, but could be occasionally easy to kill.

A Short History Of Strider

Strider 1989



Capcom's NES game is completely different to the arcade outing. Its story is far more in-depth, while Strider isn't as athletic as his arcade counterpart, being unable to scale walls or dangle underneath platforms. It remains an enjoyable adventure, but its bosses and level design are nowhere near as impressive as its 16-bit brother.

Strider II 1990



Disappointing is the best way to sum up Tiertex's sequel. While it's a decent (ish) platformer in its own right, it doesn't really feel like a proper *Strider* game. The level design and environments are rather uninspired and lack imagination, while Strider's ability to change into a robot to fight the game's bosses just seems weird.

Strider II 1991



Tiertex also released a Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear version, but they're all awful. The transformation into a robot is thankfully absent, but the trade-off includes clunky controls, recycled bosses, drab looking levels and lots of flickery visuals. A massive disappointment that we wish we could erase from our memory.

Strider 2 1999



Now this is more like it. *Strider 2* is Capcom's very own attempt at a sequel, arriving on the anniversary of the original arcade game. It's a great offering as well thanks to some excellent looking 2.5D visuals, the return of classic enemies like Solo and fast-paced gameplay. It eventually received an excellent PlayStation port, which also included a fantastic port of the original arcade game. Capcom, get this on various digital platforms now.

Strider (cancelled)



After releasing its 2D and 3D remakes of *Bionic Commando*, Grin was charged with making a brand new *Strider* game. Unfortunately, the game was cancelled early in development, and Grin itself disappeared shortly afterwards. All that's left of the game now is an earlier trailer and a few bits of concept art.

Strider (2014)



Double Helix Games's re-imagination of *Strider* will be with us early next year and promises to take the franchise in a new direction. Interestingly, it appears to be taking an approach similar to Metroidvania games, with one large game world for Strider to explore. It isn't a complete remake, and Capcom has revealed that boss favourites like Ouroboros will be returning.

▶ different cultures – most notable in cut-scenes where Spanish, English, Russian and Mandarin are all used to convey *Strider*'s story – that ensured it stood out from its arcade peers.

Then there was *Strider*'s stunning animation. While the bosses were impressive in their size and scope, it was lead character Strider Hiryu who proved to be the real stand out. In addition to featuring an impressive number of frames of animation, he was easily the most athletic videogame character around. Strider could nimbly climb up walls like a monkey, cartwheel majestically through the air, run down mountainsides, hang off and move along the undersides of platforms and even – in one of *Strider*'s most impressive stages – defy gravity. He may not have been the first ninja to appear in a videogame, but no ninja before him ever moved with his sense of deadly grace and purpose. Watching Strider in the hands of a skilled player was a joy. He could seemingly do the impossible, and everything from leaping across giant chasms to simply sliding across the ground exuded a coolness that no other hero at the time could match.

The final part of *Strider*'s aesthetic puzzle was its superbly atmospheric soundtrack, which covered a range of popular styles and further helped the game stand apart from its peers. Classical, tribal and progressive compositions were just a few of the distinctive styles used, and they all managed to perfectly capture the dynamic action taking place on screen. Take Strider's dangerous run down an exploding mountainside on the game's second stage for example. It's a dizzyingly fast piece of music that effortlessly matches the sheer franticness of Strider's desperate dash. The stunning tunes were well accompanied by a solid range of typically futuristic effects (especially Strider's Cypher, an eye-catching laser sword) that further helped persuade the player that they were experiencing something truly different.

You didn't really need state-of-the-art aesthetics to do that however, as *Strider*'s gameplay was its real pulling power. With such a nimble creation at his fingertips, Yotsui and his talented team did everything to ensure that Strider would have plenty of opportunities to show off his insanely acrobatic abilities. As a result, each stage is packed with inventive level design that allows Strider to jump, climb and somersault to his heart's content. The controls throughout are exceptionally tight, and while *Strider* can be quite a tough game at times, those slick controls meant that any deaths that did occur were always down to the over-eagerness of the player. You'd want to test those limits however, and while it often meant a careless death, it also highlighted that *Strider* actually had a fair amount of freedom to it – and diversity. One minute you were storming the nerve centre of an Eastern European country, the next you were fighting on a gigantic airship, then you'd be running across the backs of dinosaurs in the Amazon basin and fighting off deadly piranhas as they leaped up towards you. The beauty of *Strider*'s gameplay was that you never knew what its creators were going to throw at you next, and you'd continually feed ten pences into it in order to find out what their fevered imagination had thought up next.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Strider* is that it actually started off as a three-way project between Capcom and Moto Kikaku, a group of manga artists founded by Hiroshi Motomiya. In addition to Yotsui's arcade game, Capcom was also working on a release for Nintendo's NES, while author Tetsuo Shiba and illustrator Tatsumi Wadi worked on the Manga. Initially, all three projects were meant to complement each other and come out at the same time, but both the NES and arcade games were delayed. As a result the manga debuted a good ten months before Yotsui's game and at least a year before the NES outing (which ended up being an exclusive release in America only). Interestingly, the NES game was more in line with the Manga's plot, while Yotsui (no doubt enamoured with the sheer amount of technology at his fingertips) took his arcade game into even more outlandish directions.

Strider's success meant that he featured in a couple of sequels – one by Capcom, the other by Tiertex – and made several cameos in other Capcom games, particularly its *Versus* fighting series. However, it has now been 14 years since an official *Strider* game. It remains to be seen if Double Helix Games can recapture the essence of Capcom's original arcade game, but at least it is no longer ignoring *Strider*'s hardcore fan base. And if the new *Strider* doesn't manage to recapture the glory days of Isuke's stunning game, at least we still have the incredible original to enjoy.

» [Arcade] *Strider* is full of fantastic imaginative moments. Here's one of our many favourites.



» Kouichi 'Isuke' Yotsui proudly poses for **Retro Gamer** with his original art.



©Jon Szczepaniak

Memorable Moments

All the best bits from Capcom's thrilling arcade game





"Gonna take you for a ride"
The first proper boss fight is with Ouroboros, a hammer and sickle-wielding centipede monstrosity. Thanks to Strider's agility he's able to ride the behemoth's back as he pummels it into submission. Strider also rides him again to the showdown with Grandmaster Meio.



Incoming!
From the moment *Strider* starts you know you're in for a treat. Strider Hiryu glides into enemy territory via a swanky hang glider, only to carve everything that falls within range of his deadly Cypher sword upon landing.

Downhill run
Yes we've gone on about this in the past, but for good reason. It remains one of the most exhilarating moments to be found in any videogame. If you don't find this amazing, check your heart – it's probably stopped.



Walking with dinosaurs
We didn't realise that dinosaurs were alive and well in the Amazon! Revelations aside it nevertheless makes for a fantastic moment, with Strider running along the backs of apatosauruses and avoiding low-flying pterodactyls on his way to a showdown with Level Four's metallic boss.



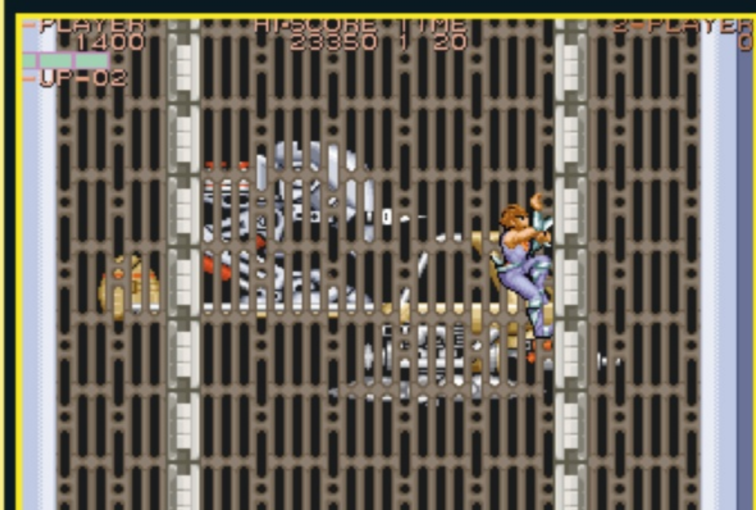
Lights out!
Strider's second level is filled with magical moments, but this remains one of the best. After running down the mountainside, Strider finds himself in an old power station. Surrounded by wolves and dangerous machines, he must reach the station's zenith while dealing with a power cut.



Dancing on the ceiling
Strider's third level introduces excellent anti-gravity sections, with Strider often fighting upside down. It culminates with an awesome battle with an Anti-Gravity Device that sees Strider flying around its outside while avoiding its satellites. A truly thrilling battle.



Power-Up!
There's a solid selection of power-ups in *Strider*, ranging from handy drones that follow you around to a giant loyal metallic panther. The best, however, makes you invulnerable and has projectile images that follow Strider around. It looks amazing.



Climbing
Halfway through the third level you're forced to start climbing up an ever-narrowing wall. Panic sets in when enemies start following you and you realise simple climbing won't do, so you must leap from side to side before you're completely crushed.

Higher and higher
The flying airship Balrog waits above you, but first you have to reach it. Strider complies by leaping from a number of flying skiffs and dodging parachuting bombs that rain downwards. It's heart-stopping, but exhilarating all the same.





Gravity defying puzzles
Although you briefly dabble with gravity on Level Three, it's put to far better use on the final stage. You'll need to navigate a number of deadly spikes and enemies completely upside down, requiring Strider to take large leaps of faith with him seconds away from death.

The coin-op conversions

Strider had an impressive number of home conversions. Here's our opinion on all of them…



DOS

One of the best things about the PC game is how fast Strider is. There's a nice pace to it that well suits the agile ninja. Sadly, despite the power of the machine, there's a lot of missing elements to *Strider*. The graphics take the biggest hit with many incidental background graphics being nowhere to be seen. Bosses like the giant metallic dinosaur (as well as the apatosauruses you ride on) are nowhere to be seen either. As with many other versions there is no slide option, while it also switches levels three and four. A solid port, but not quite as strong as the Atari ST and Amiga conversions.



Mega Drive

For many this is the benchmark 16-bit version. Sega did a cracking job with the conversion and, while there's the odd bit of flicker, the controls, sound and visuals are all of a very high standard. All the levels are included and the soundtrack is there, while the all-important *feel* of the game is just right. The only downside is that European and US owners got treated to some atrocious box art.

Atari ST

The Atari ST version is really good, although it can't hope to compare with the 16-bit console versions. The graphics are nice and colourful, all the bosses are included (although Levels Three and Four are switched) and there's a good stab at many of the original tunes. Strider also has his floor dash, which is nice to see, while it all moves along at a nice pace. While his leaps are a little slow, the ability to change his firing direction on a whim makes this very close to the arcade original.



Mobile Phone

Amazingly, *Strider* received a mobile phone port in 2010. It suffers due to the lower resolution of the phone's hardware (it was only released on the FOMA 703i and 903i) and the fact that a phone's keys are not well suited to an acrobatic ninja.



TurboGrafx CD

The PC Engine version was in development forever, taking over four years to create. It lacks the resolution of the Mega Drive version but includes a number of enhancements, many of which weren't in the original arcade game. There are additional cut-scenes and the sound has been remixed using Red Book audio, but the biggest addition is a brand new level that's found after the first stage, a free-wheeling run through a desert that has you battling tanks and a giant ant lion.



Master System

Sega also handled the Master System version of *Strider* and did another impressive job. The biggest issue is that the graphics obviously take a substantial hit. While they're clearly better than the 8-bit home computers in a lot of respects, they do suffer from huge amounts of flicker. The levels are also relatively empty, with many missing enemies. Oh, and Strider's forgotten how to do his floor slide, making certain sections of the game a little harder than they need to be.







Amiga

The Amiga version appears to be identical to the Atari ST version (we certainly couldn't spot any major differences). We actually feel it loses out ever so slightly due to a slightly inferior sounding soundtrack, but there's little in it. As a result it's otherwise identical, meaning all the same criticism and praise applies. Another very good 16-bit offering from Tiertex.

PlayStation

This is a near perfect reproduction let down by some short loads between stages. The best ports are on *Capcom Classics Collection 2* and *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed.*



ZX Spectrum

The Spectrum version is interesting. While it's not very colourful compared to the Amstrad CPC offering, the sprite design is of a good standard and enemies are instantly recognisable. As with many of the 8-bit versions, various enemies and backgrounds are missing and there's a complete lack of music in-game (with some pretty poor sound effects to boot). The Anti-Gravity boss is static and simply hangs in the air, while Lago is nowhere to be seen.



Sharp X68000

For many this is the definitive version of the game (until the PSone port) and it's easy to see why. It's pretty much arcade-perfect with great looking visuals and a superb reproduction of the soundtrack. There is a lot of flicker, which lets it down somewhat, but it's impressive how close this is to the original game. *Strider* on the X68000 is another fine example of why Sharp's machine is so highly sought after by collectors.



Commodore 64

We quite like the C64 offering. It has the same issue of speed as the Amstrad version, but feels more playable. The graphics are nice and chunky, with easily recognisable enemies and levels. There's still a lot of background detail missing but it's arguably the best looking of the three home computers, and, unlike the Speccy and CPC versions, includes the slide dash. There's a funky rendition of the first level's music as well, which plays throughout. Sadly, the Anti-Gravity boss is missing and the difficulty curve is a little high.



Amstrad CPC

This is easily the worst of the 8-bit home computer versions. In many ways it appears to be extremely similar to the Spectrum version, albeit with more colourful visuals. It's let down though by horrendously slow scrolling that makes it a massive chore to play, even though Strider himself is fairly nippy to control. A terrible port and quite possibly the worst we've played. Amstrad *Strider* deserved far better than this. Maybe someone will make an *R-Type*-style update for us…

Interview

Paul Cole discusses Strider's C64 conversion



How did you manage to get the job coding *Strider*?
The contract was won by Tiertex, where I was working at the time. Being the next free C64 coder there, I got given the honour of developing the game.

What support did you receive from Capcom?
The only support we had was that we were given the game on an arcade board so that we could play and copy the graphics from the game. The graphics were produced by freezing the game and digitising the output from the board. This gave us the Amiga and Atari ST version graphics, of which they were reduced down for the C64 and other computers.

What were the hardest aspects to capture from the original game?
The hardest parts to convert were some of the huge end of level bosses, as these were so big most sprite multiplexors couldn't handle them, so we had to use character-based bosses which did lead to a drop in graphic qualities.

What did you like best about the whole conversion process?
The best part of any conversion is being able to play the arcade version on free-play, spending time playing all the way through as you need to look at something on the final level.

Your version of the game received extremely mixed reviews at the time, would you say these were fair?
Most of the reviews looking back seemed to be fair, the trouble was that in trying to get something close visually to the original it stretched the C64 to the limits, which meant the gameplay suffered. When we developed *Strider II*, our own follow up, we learnt by the mistakes and so produced a more flowing game.

Is it true that your port was based on the Amiga version and not the original arcade game?
The C64 was based on the Arcade version, it was developed at the same time as the Amiga. The graphics were ported down from the Amiga version but the game play was co-designed.

Special thanks to Kieren Hawken and John Szczepaniak for additional screenshots and Striderpedia for its Japanese translations.

IMPORT ONLY



INFO



- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **DEVELOPER:** DREAM FACTORY
- » **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15-£20

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



VIRTUA FIGHTER
RELEASED: **1993**
Sega was pretty much the first name in 3D fighting back in the early days, though it didn't take everyone else long to see the potential and jump on the bandwagon. Amazingly, though, *VF* is still the one to beat in the genre – *Final Showdown* is a masterpiece.

▼ Modern



UFC UNDISPUTED 3
RELEASED: **2012**
The fighting scene is pretty hard to break into these days compared to the genre's early years, but strangely it's THQ's MMA swansong that falls closest to *Tobal*'s groundbreaking system of holds, counters, positioning and mind games. It doesn't have a giant chicken man, though, so whatever.

TOBAL 2

» ERGHEIZ WASN'T THE ONLY PLAYSTATION FIGHTER WITH FINAL FANTASY CAMEOS, Y'KNOW – IN FACT, THIS JAPAN-ONLY BEAT-'EM-UP GOT THERE FIRST. LUKE ALBIGÉS REVISITS THE SUPER-SLICK 32-BIT FIGHTER TO FIND OUT WHY IT NEVER TRAVELLED WEST…



» [PlayStation] The Gouraud Shading (rather than extensive use of textures) helps *Tobal 2* age more gracefully than many fighters of the era.

For all the great fighting games that have come and gone, it's a real shame that so many have been resigned to the annals of history. So many have been usurped, so many replaced, so many simply improved upon that they no longer serve any real purpose beyond pure nostalgia. But a few still stand out. A few that tried to do something different and that can't be taken away or replaced. So it's a real shame that one such game never even got a Western release and, as such, will never truly be recognised for furthering the noble intentions of the genre.

Square's confidence in *Tobal* was so low that the original game had to be bundled with the first playable demo of *Final Fantasy VII*, which proved to be both a curse and a blessing. It was a rock-solid fighting game with a bunch of novel ideas, though now the history books write it off as an expensive *FFVII* demo. As has been proven countless times over the years, the fighting business is incredibly hard to break into – Capcom, SNK and Arc System Works have the 2D side on lockdown while Namco dominates 3D with lifelong champions *Tekken* and *SoulCalibur*. But that hasn't stopped developers trying and, especially during the polygon boom, everybody wanted a piece of the pie and used every gimmick at their disposal to stand out. The garish mechs of *Zero Divide*; the 'just keep releasing them and eventually one might be good' ethos of *Battle Arena Toshinden*; the wholesale identity theft of Steven Seagal for the role of Douglas in *Kensai: Sacred Fist*; the fight-ending dismemberments of *Bushido Blade*. Developers tried everything – even *Dynasty Warriors* started life as a one-on-one fighter, although Koei wisely hit the eject button for the follow-up and has been making the same game ever since.

But when it comes to novel features, *Tobal* stands head and shoulders above all such pretenders. Akira Toriyama of *Dragon Ball* fame was brought in to design the characters and the result is one of the most curious rosters we've ever seen. Chuji is pretty much your generic anime protagonist but beyond that, things start to get a bit strange. There's Oliems, a huge blue chicken man



» [PlayStation] Whoever decided that frogs should be able to use Ken's Shoryu-Reppa is both a genius and an asshole. What a way to die…

"Tobal 2 holds the record for the largest number of playable characters in a commercially released fighting game"

that clucks during fights. There's Ill-Goga, a singlet-wearing demon that makes liberal use of his tail during combos. There's Mary, a burly female grappler with arms the size of most people's waists. And it just keeps getting stranger.

Frog-marching egg-thing Mufu. Tiny bunny emperor Udan. Robotic Dhalsim wannabe Hom. This sequel also added two new faces to the main roster, Deejay-esque military surgeon Doctor V and cyberwoman Chaco, both of whom slotted into the oddball cast perfectly. But Dream Factory didn't stop there. In fact, *Tobal 2* holds the record for the largest number of playable characters in a commercially released fighting game, with over 200 in total available once you round up all of the off-menu fighters that appear in the game's ambitious Quest mode.

Effectively a full-featured mini-RPG where battles play out in the game's excellent fighting engine, Quest mode evolved hugely from the simple corridor-heavy version that appeared in the original. In *Tobal 2*, there's a town to explore, shops to visit, NPCs to chat with and six whole dungeons to invade, and while movement is quite tricky to get to grips with, that's the only aspect of the mode that doesn't translate well from the core fighting.

Another of the developer's desperate pleas for attention can be seen here, namely the manner in which Quest enemies are added to the playable roster – after weakening them with attacks, you need to throw a special stone at them to capture them. With Pokémania running wild at the time, it's hard to see this as anything more than pandering, although that's not to say it isn't a good mechanic. With every new critter you recruit, you'll want to head out of the dungeon and into practice mode to see what they can do.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



TOBAL NO. 1

» It's amazing how little has actually changed in the 3D fighter hierarchy over the years – *Tekken* and *VF* are still the top-tier choices, *SoulCalibur*'s intrinsic lack of balance still doesn't harm its mid-tier positioning and everything else sits just below. With so few new 3D fighters entering the fray, those looking for ways things could be done differently would do well to look to the original *Tobal*, although the sequel refines and improves just about every aspect and isn't hard to get working thanks to the classic PSone swap trick.

But it isn't just the Quest mode that makes *Tobal* stand out. Heavy use of Gouraud Shading ensures an anime-style feel to the visuals and, while simple, it's easily one of the better-looking games on PlayStation and that's helped by the flawless 60fps framerate. Composer Takayuki Nakamura (*Virtua Fighter*) rounded off the aesthetic package with some great tunes to complement the action and, even in the ring, there were more than enough novel ideas at work to give the game a fighting chance.

Doing away with canned throws, the game's grapple system was almost a metagame of its own – when characters lock up, each can call upon an array of commands to transition into different holds, deliver clinch strikes, move the opponent around or deliver powerful throw finishers, but each can be interrupted, reversed or countered if the opponent knows what they're doing. It's more like a wrestling game in this respect, although perhaps that's partly where *Tobal* fell down – this is an insanely complex system for a game of the time (especially when flashy throws in rival fighters are rarely more than a couple of button presses away) and many could have been put off by the amount of learning involved in mastering it.

But for all its improvements and innovations, it was the poor sales of the first game that prevented Square from pushing for a worldwide release – if the original couldn't even meet expectations with a playable version of *FFVII* in the box, what hope would the sequel have in the West? So ultimately, it was the lack of Cloud that stopped us from being able to fight as Chocobos. Irony's a bitch.



» [PlayStation] Characters' eyes can be controlled during win poses using the D-pad. Pointless, sure, but also slightly terrifying and utterly brilliant.

GO DEEPER Fists of fury



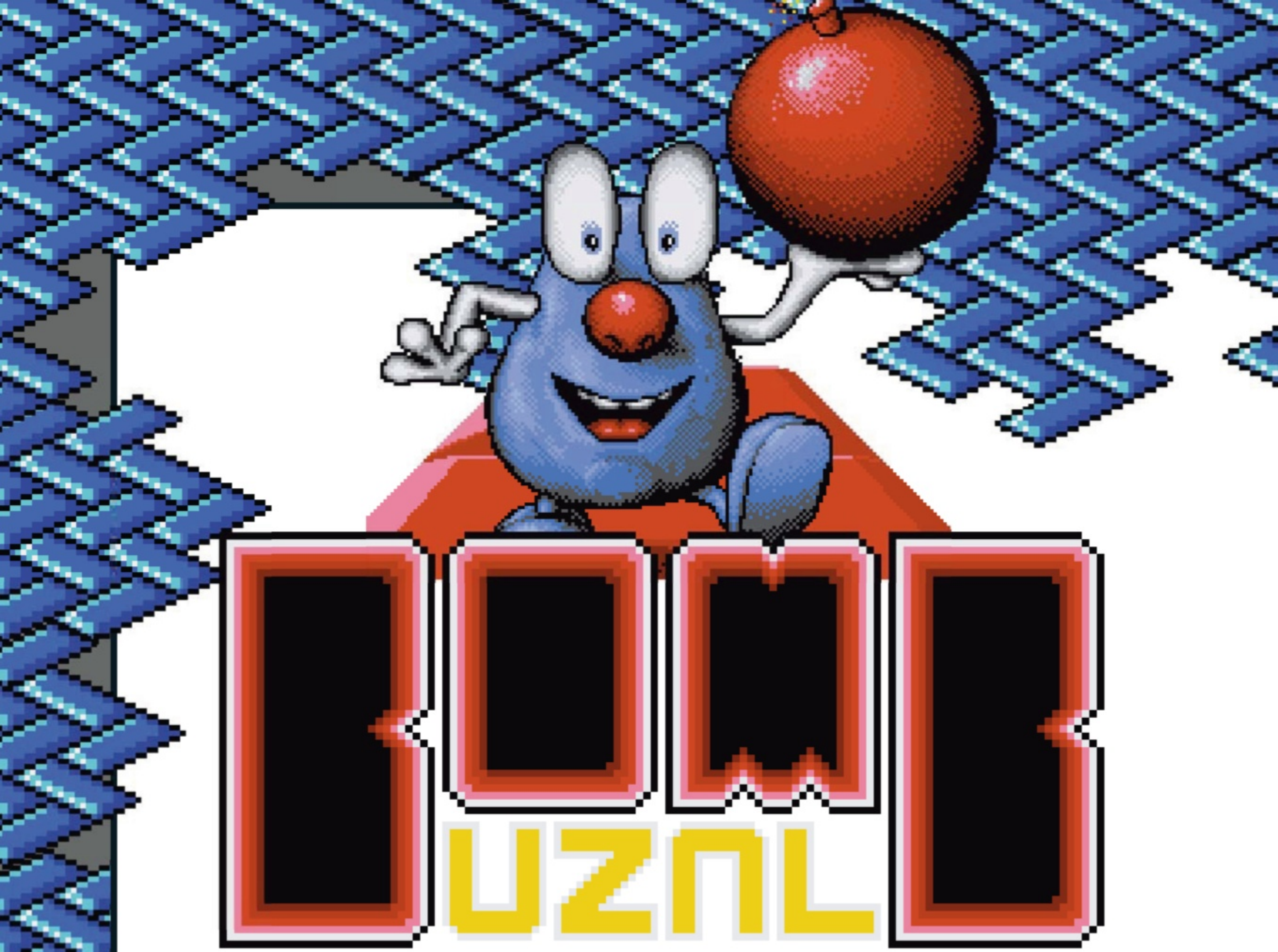
AGAINST THE CLOCK
» Given the relatively slow pace and defensive nature of the game, it's not unusual for matches to go the distance. Keep an eye on the clock and on your life bar.

HEADS, I WIN
» Chuji is the game's Ryu, effectively. He's the poster boy for the franchise, though that's probably just because he looks the most like a *Dragon Ball Z* character.

FALLING FOR YOU
» The universal grapple system more or less gives everyone an equal shot at a cheap Ring Out, a breath of fresh air for the mechanic after games like *Soul Blade*.

BODY AND SOUL
» Every character has a chargeable fireball move that costs life the longer you charge it but deals more damage as a result. Noobs: abuse this.

TAILS, YOU LOSE
» Ill-Goga's tail is a mixed bag – it'll grant you that little extra distance on attacks but, with the counter system, opponents can grab it and toss you around.



Tread softly, for you tread on their bombs. Andrew Fisher talks to Tony Crowther and David Bishop about designing the devious puzzle game that became a hit for Image Works

The press hyped the formation of Mirrorsoft's new Image Works label like a football team announcing its new signings. The Bitmap Brothers became stars thanks to *Speedball,* but the partnership of Tony Crowther and David Bishop joining the label was also big news. They had previously worked together for Mirrorsoft, creating *Zig Zag* – an isometric C64 game combining mazes, shooting and puzzles.

As David remembers, "*Bombuzal* was our Christmas present to John Cook at Mirrorsoft. We were due to deliver another game and did *Bombuzal* in our 'spare time' in parallel and delivered two games at the same time when he was expecting just the one that had been commissioned." Tony talks about the other project. "Mirrorsoft got in touch with me to see if I could do the C64 version of *Fernandez Must Die*. The Atari ST version was underway, and they had nobody to do the C64 version. I changed the game a little, as a C64 was not an Atari ST."

So where did *Bombuzal* spring from? Tony says, "We had just done *Zig Zag*, and I had a few ideas on how to improve the look of the 3D. So, we bounced ideas off each other, I started work on the code and David was working on completing the design. I had not seen any other games with logic problems like this before, so it was all exciting stuff. We had not been green-lit by any company, so we weren't doing it for money, it was our pet project." David enjoyed the collaborative process. "I remember we threw the initial idea around during one of the weekends when I was at Tony's house in Sheffield. We went back and forth for a while but, pretty soon, we had a structure for the game and went from there. Normally, our combined ideas were stronger as a result of collaborating – it was a fairly natural part of making our games. Tony is super creative as well as being a black belt code ninja."

The aim of each level in *Bombuzal* was to detonate all the bombs without being blown up or falling off the tiles. As the complexity increased, more types of tile and bomb were added – riveted tiles could survive an explosion, switches altered the level layout and tiles with slots allowed the bombs to be moved. The most unusual idea was that the game could be viewed in two different ways, a top-down 2D view and an isometric 3D view.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** IMAGE WORKS
- » **DEVELOPER:** TONY CROWTHER & DAVID BISHOP
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:** PUZZLE



» [Amiga] Triggering an A-bomb will detonate all the A-bombs on the level at once.

> **Tony is super creative, as well as being a black belt code ninja**
> David Bishop on Tony Crowther

"Tony and I liked isometric games," says David. "Although *Bombuzal* was easier to play in top-down mode, Tony was able to add the isometric view fairly easily so we decided to keep both views and give players the choice. We also felt that the isometric view would screenshot better and allow us to show off the characters that appeared in later levels in their best light." Tony agrees. "The editor was 2D but the game was 3D, and I believed the 2D was easier to play. The levels were designed in 2D so they may have lost some of the expected view. As it happens we ended up using the map that was a tiny 2D view."

Pre-release hype announced that several gaming celebrities had designed levels. These included Jeff Minter, Andrew Braybrook, Geoff Crammond, Dave 'Ubik' Korn and Jon Ritman. Jeff's level exploded to leave behind a llama. Jon takes some prompting. "I do remember designing a single level that basically had my name as the playable area – a bit naff, I know. I'm guessing there was an editor but I remember nothing about it." Andrew Braybrook also draws a blank, but he contributed to the 130 levels that made up the game.

David admits, "One of the first things we did was spec out an editor that I could use to design levels during the week and then bring up to Sheffield at the weekend. I was (am still) not very technical, so it needed to be something a non-coder could use. Tony did such a great job with the editor we realised that we could maybe give it to a few additional people to design some levels for us. We made copies of the editor on C64 disks and gave them to a few people we knew in the industry – pretty quickly we got some great levels back so we decided to cast the net a little wider. We also came up with a cunning plan to send disks to all the editors of the magazines that would likely be reviewing the game when it was published. Our rationale was that any editor that had designed a level for a game would at least give it a half-decent review!" *Zzap!64* and *Your Commodore* were among the magazines that contributed. *ACE* magazine joked it could start a trend: "Imagine a level of *Dungeon Master* designed by Christopher Lee, a planet from *Oids* by Neil Armstrong, or an area of *Batman* by Adam West."

Tony laughs when asked if he still has the editor. "It will most likely be on a disk in the loft eroding. But to be honest it was nothing complicated, and could knock an editor up in no time. Oh, hang on… I just did for the last project I worked on! Getting the guest level ▶





» [PC] Bubble the droid prepares to sacrifice himself to complete the level.



» David Bishop, co-designer of *Bombuzal*.

AFTER THE SMOKE HAS CLEARED

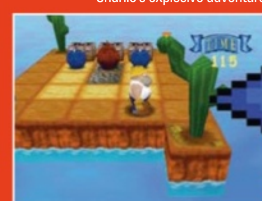
Bombuzal's legacy blasts its way into the Nineties…

■ Kemco created a *Bombuzal*-style game called *The Bombing Islands* for PlayStation in 1997. It featured Kid Klown, a cute character designed by Kemco as a replacement for Mickey Mouse in an earlier NES game. As well as the movable 3D camera and being able to push the bombs around, *The Bombing Islands* added a step counter – the fewer taken to finish a level, the better the medal awarded.

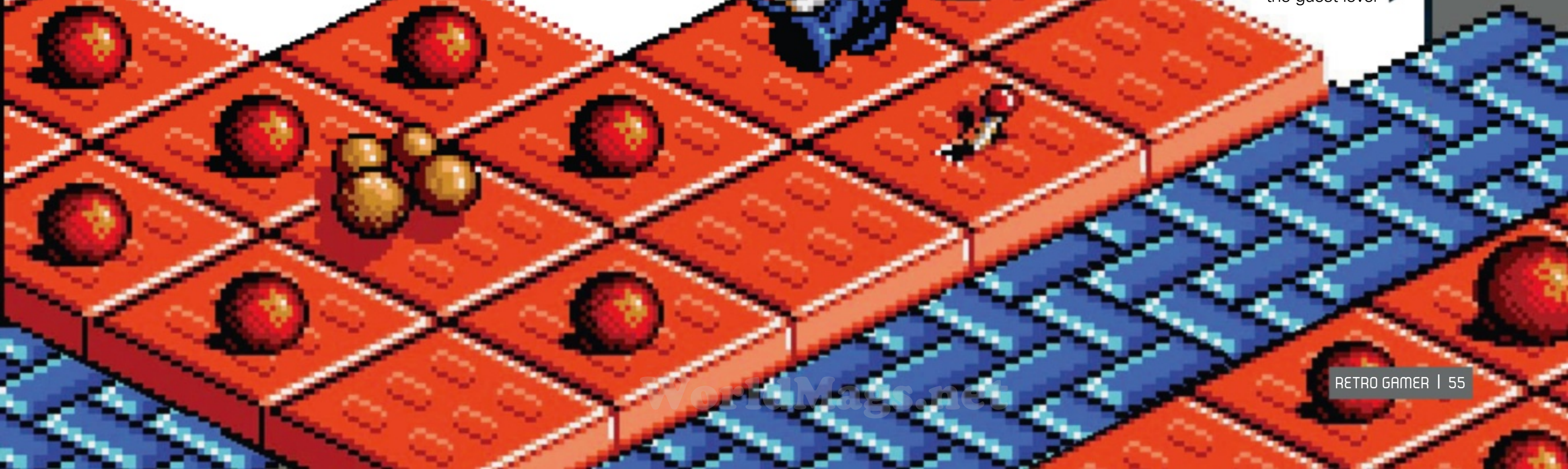
Realtime Associates independently developed the N64 budget game *Charlie Blast's Territory*. This removed the step counter but added the ability to jump. The multiplayer had extra types of bomb, and Capture Mode saw players capturing territory with their bomb blasts.



» [PlayStation] Kid Klown thinks carefully before blowing himself up



» [N64] The first level of Charlie's explosive adventure

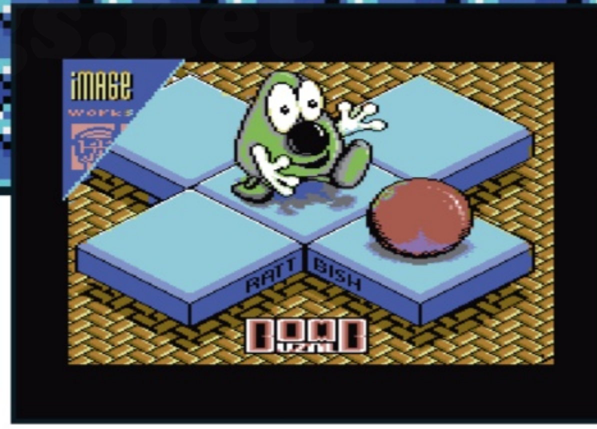


designers was fun, I remember helping Jeff Minter with his level. I think I visited him at home, but can't remember much more than that." Passwords were given every few levels, allowing the player to restart at that point. The later SNES version was more generous with a code for every level. Among the codes were Ratt, Bish and Lisa, Tony's wife. The C64 version started with a message "Dedicated to Frank Revill" – Lisa's father who sadly passed away during the creation of *Bombuzal*.

This was Tony's first 16-bit game, so he called in programmer Ross Goodley. Tony says, "I didn't do the code, I just did the graphics. It was a big change from working with four colours. But this did make me take the plunge to move to 16-bit on the next project, *Phobia*. That was the project [when] I said goodbye to the C64." As for the challenge of 16-bit, David remarks, "We did *Bombuzal* originally on the C64. I do remember thinking that the ST and Amiga were like a whole new world for us to creatively explore. In terms of a technical learning curve, one of the things that makes Tony such a talented engineer and has kept him at the top of his game even today (he's now at Sumo doing great stuff there!) is his ability to master hardware architectures really quickly."



» [C64] Gary Liddon and Gary Penn created the *Zzap64!* level (larger than the map display can show).





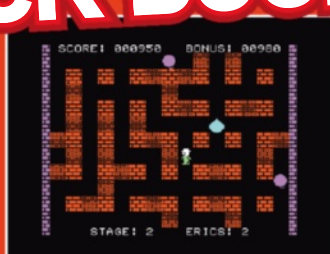
» [C64] Tony Crowther (known as RATT on Compunet) created the graphics, including the loading screen.

Ross started programming while studying German at Sheffield University, and in 1982 he joined Alligata Software. There he met Tony and they worked together over a number of years. "There were no particular tricks involved in the Amiga version of *Bombuzal* since the hardware was well capable of handling the project in a fairly straightforward fashion." says Ross. "The ST version was somewhat more of a challenge, as the hardware had no real support for scrolling or audio sample playback. Scrolling was handled by maintaining a circular frame buffer that was dumped to the display file every frame, using an offset from the start of the buffer to create the scrolling effect. Sample playback involved using a fast interrupt to constantly modify the volume setting of the, frankly, rather poor audio chip with which the ST had been burdened. Code was shared between the Amiga and ST versions, but since the video and audio hardware on the two platforms was so dissimilar the fact that they shared a main processor was of less help than I might have liked."

Tony says, "I think from the idea to up-and-running was around two weeks. So things were moving fast, getting the guest level designers up and running was the biggest delay. We presented the finished game

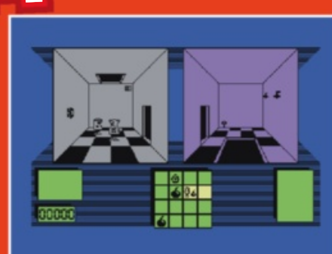
TICK TOCK BOOM

For all you pyromaniacs, here are several more bomb-based games…



ERIC & THE FLOATERS
SPECTRUM

■ This strangely named game was actually the Spectrum conversion of Hudson Soft's first *Bomberman* game. The staples of the single-player mode are present, with you blowing up brick walls and enemies floating around the maze. Of course it's the multiplayer modes that made the rest of the series so popular…



DEACTIVATORS C64

■ A fascinating puzzle game from Ariolasoft, also designed by David Bishop. You control multiple droids – viewed in a unique 3D style – trying to defuse bombs in a research building where even the gravity changes. Dark rooms, teleporters and enemy droids make the task even more difficult. Read more about the game's creation in Issue 119's Making Of feature.



BOMB JACK ARCADE

■ Tecmo's biggest coin-op hit – converted to home formats with varying degrees of success – awards bonus points for defusing as many lit bombs per screen as possible; the player has to follow the sequence carefully once the first bomb has been collected. The globetrotting Jack also has to avoid swarms of spawning enemies until he can grab the power-up coins.

to Image Works and they loved it – so we did get paid!" David recalls it took three months in total. "I mentioned John Cook earlier, he was, and still is, a good friend and someone who I respected and with whom I enjoyed working – he gave Tony and I free reign in terms of the games we did for Mirrorsoft/Image Works. We also enjoyed working with the other key people at Mirrorsoft, especially Jim Mackonochie, one of the industry's true gentlemen who sadly passed away earlier this year."

Reviews were incredibly positive, with an *ACE* rating of 919 (out of 1000) and *Zzap!* calling it "the cutest puzzle game on the C64", awarding a Gold Medal and 97%. A month later, the Amiga version gained a Sizzler with 92%. The only dissenting voice was *CU Amiga*, handing out a miserly 49%. *Amiga Power* was much more enthusiastic. Stuart Campbell's review in issue 0 (the preview issue) scored 84%, calling it "a genuine, unadulterated classic everyone should own" – and the full game was free on issue one's cover disk, before ELSPA clamped down on magazines giving away complete games.

C&VG mentioned a monochrome Spectrum version at the end of its review – the Spectrum was also listed in advertisements – but it was never released. The PC version was hampered by the way the EGA 3D display flick-scrolled. Tony says, "I didn't know anything about the SNES and PC versions; it was just one day I saw it in a magazine and thought 'cool, they have retained my graphics from the Amiga'. Not sure why the changed the name to *Ka-blooey*." David adds, "John did tell us about the name change – we had no say in that but understood at the time that *Bombuzal* would not be a strong name in the US for whatever reason." Plans for a sequel, mentioned alongside the *Amiga Power* review, fell through. This would have had ladders allowing access to layers of platforms and enemies to defeat. Although David and Tony fail to recall much detail, the project was abandoned with the closure of Mirrorsoft after Robert Maxwell's death.



» [Atari ST] The first level of the game as it appears in 2D and 3D.

Bombuzal's legacy included two spin-off games and PC remake *Bombzuka* by xCept, entered in the 2006 Retro Remakes competition. David and Tony are still in the industry, but Ross has moved away from games. His opinion on *Bombuzal*? "I thought then and still think that it was an excellent design that did not get the recognition that it deserved. An outstanding action-puzzler that would give a great sense of satisfaction when a hard thought-out level finally 'clicked', a game that had that 'just one more go before bedtime' factor."

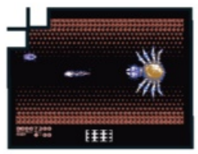
> **"It was an excellent design that did not get the recognition that it deserved"**
> Ross Goodley



» [C64] Bad guy Sinister always turns left, and the slotted tiles let you move bombs around.



» [C64] A reference to the magazine *Your Commodore* (CBM stood for Commodore Business Machines).



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZIG ZAG
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1988

FERNANDEZ MUST DIE
SYSTEM: C64, AMIGA
YEAR: 1988

PHOBIA (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1989



KABOOM! ATARI 2600

■ Defusing a bomb with a bucket full of water may seem easy at first, but the pace and difficulty soon climb in this Activision hit by Larry Kaplan. The Mad Bomber throws huge numbers of bombs down the screen, which must be caught with the moving buckets (controlled by the paddles) before they hit the ground.



PSYCHO PIGS UXB C64

■ Infamous for US Gold's risqué advertising campaign, this was based on arcade game *Butasan*. Each level sees one or two players trying to blow up the other pigs by direct contact with a thrown bomb or getting caught in the explosion when the bomb's timer runs out. The frantic bonus round sees the player kissing the pigs that pop up.



CRACK DOWN MEGA DRIVE

■ This lesser-known Sega arcade game resembled *Gauntlet* with its two-player maze action. In each level, secret agents Ben and Andy must thwart mad scientist Mr X by planting bombs and escaping before the timer expires. Large red X's show where to place them. The Mega Drive conversion was available on the Wii's Virtual Console.



SPY VS SPY ATARI 800

■ Mike Riedel's original game of espionage (based on the *MAD* magazine comic strip) featured two devious types of bomb to attack your rival spy with. The small bomb can be placed as a trap in the embassy's furniture, blowing up when the other player searches. The time bomb is trickier to get right but blows up the whole room…

FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F

THE CONSOLE THAT CHANGED GAMING



©Evan-Amos

The Fairchild Channel F is little known to modern gamers, as is its inventor Jerry Lawson. In this month's retrospective, Marty Goldberg gives you the inside scoop on the console that changed the consumer videogame industry for good

There's no other way to describe the Channel F other than a game-changer in the consumer videogame console industry. While it didn't cause dedicated console manufacturers to fly out of the market, it did signify a major coming change in the approach to consoles. It seems almost appropriate now that the company to give most of the world its introduction to microprocessor-driven home consoles was a semiconductor manufacturer. Much like the position Apple was in almost three decades later, this manufacturer had the capabilities to run all aspects of the console's creative process – design, fabrication and manufacturing. That company was Fairchild, and its division, Fairchild Semiconductor.

While the Channel F was in development at the same time as the Atari Video Computer System, Fairchild was the first to the market, launching in November 1976. Ultimately, what nullified any headstart over Atari was the hard lesson future competitors learned as well: If you don't have hot titles and people who know how to design the games people want to play, your console is not going to sell. But instead of jumping ahead, let's go back to the very beginning of the Channel F.

We mean literally the very beginning – the origins of the Channel F's chief creator. The Channel F's story starts with African-American engineer Jerry Lawson, an acquaintance of Atari notable Al Alcorn. Jerry was born during December 1940, and grew up in Queens, New York City. Getting into electronics young, Jerry was an amateur radio operator from the age of 13 and a typical 'science kid'. Building an amateur radio station in his room, he was a true testament to the changing stature of African-Americans in American society, a traditionally hostile environment for the ethnicity. In fact, Jerry's own grandfather had been a physicist who couldn't get hired by anyone except the post office.

Jerry's creative and entrepreneurial juices also started young when he started building and selling walkie-talkies. By his late teens he was doing television repairs, buying repair parts with a small allowance from his mother. The experience eventually led him to attend both Queens College and City College of New York (CCNY) to formally study electronics. After college, Jerry's skills were further built up in an employment tour of the then who's who of the US electronics industry, starting with Grumman Aircraft and then Federal Electronics (a division of ITT) where he got to work with his true love – radar. From there it was PRD Electronics, a job that required him to go to programming school to learn how to code for the UNIVAC ▶

FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
TOP FIVE

VIDEO BLACKJACK 1976
DEVELOPER: Fairchild

■ This was a launch title for the Fairchild and was certainly impressive for 1976, with presentation and details that wouldn't look out of place on the later Intellivision. It's a stronger effort than the later Atari release and is only let down by cryptic command options.



TIC-TAC-TOE 1976
DEVELOPER: Fairchild

■ While the graphics for this release are nothing special, it was unusual at the time for taunting you with "You lose turkey!" whenever you lost. It was released on *Videocart-1*, which also included *Shooting Gallery*, *Doodle* and (if one doodle program wasn't enough) *Quadra-Doodle*.



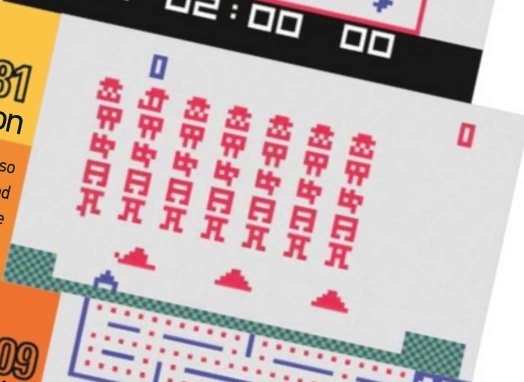
DESERT FOX 1976
DEVELOPER: Fairchild

■ Fairchild managed to release a version of Atari's arcade game *Tank* a year before Atari managed to include it as part of its pack-in title *Combat* for the launch of the Atari 2600. While it's missing *Tank*'s full-screen mazes, it does make great use of the Fairchild's unique controllers.



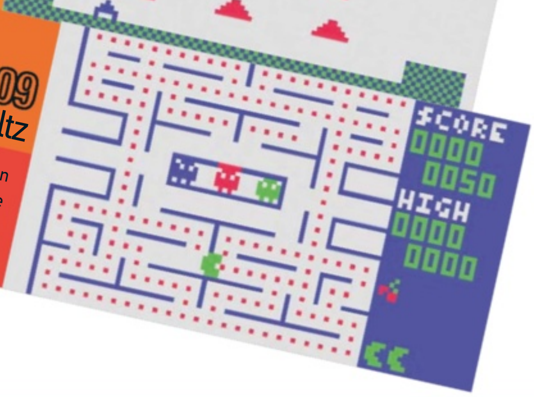
ALIEN INVASION 1981
DEVELOPER: Fairchild/Zircon

■ This was the last official cartridge, yet was first started in 1978. It's also the first (albeit unlicensed) conversion of *Space Invaders*. Designer Brad Reid-Selth changed the shields to pyramids and made the aliens look like hieroglyphics to skirt around potential legalities. Highly recommended.



PAC-MAN 2009
DEVELOPER: Fredric Blåholtz

■ A true rarity: a Channel F homebrew game. Created by Channel F fan Fredric Blåholtz, this actually manages to show off the potential of the system to handle the popular games of the period. Although only 50 copies exist, the ROM has been made available on the emulator MESS.





» We love the sleek design of the Channel F, it looked impossibly cool back in 1976.

▶ 128 mainframe the company was using for testing. While PRD gave him one of the key insights needed for the creation of the Channel F, it was the following job at Kaiser Electronics that got him to move from the East Coast to the West Coast in 1968, and the technology hotbed Palo Alto specifically. Eventually leaving to join various semiconductor companies, Jerry wound up at Fairchild Electronics in 1970 when they started taking on 'freelance engineers', a forerunner of today's tech consultants. In this case his job would be to visit Fairchild customers and help them with their product designs, functioning in a position called a Field Application Engineer.

Being the first in this new position, Jerry decided to think outside the box and asked Fairchild for a custom mobile home that was a Fairchild lab on wheels. It was during this time that Jerry saw his first videogame, Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney's *Computer Space*. A chance encounter in 1972 would lead him to walk through the doors of Nolan and Ted's new company Syzygy Co and meet Al Alcorn for the first time. In these very early days before the company formally changed its name to Atari Inc, Al was smack in the middle of developing *Pong* when Jerry came walking in to try and sell them Fairchild character generators (electronic circuitry for putting alphanumeric characters on a screen). Al didn't need the generator – Nolan's stringent requirement for



» The cartridge port was capable of taking large cartridges that were a similar size to the 8-track tape cartridges that were popular at the time.



THE CARTRIDGE FAMILY

Examining the Videocart design





The Channel F's cartridges, or Videocarts as they're called, are what the system is most known for. They look like eight-track tapes, and in fact the way the cartridges insert into the front of the console is very much like eight-track tape cartridges. This similarity is not a coincidence, and Fairchild leveraged people's familiarity with the audio medium when designing the first cartridge format. In fact, the system's manual even draws on this by stating the carts are inserted in "much the same way an eight-track audio cartridge is into a cartridge tape player."

Ron Smith did the mechanical design of the cartridge and cartridge bay on the system, designing a unique locking mechanism that not only secures the cartridge and flips open the protective cartridge contact cover, but grounds the cartridge from static charges. Ron also designed a cassette deck-style Eject button for safely removing the cartridge. Both designs were patented on 23 Aug 1976.

Inside the cartridge is almost no circuitry – just two of the companion ROM chips (the Fairchild 3851) that make up the F8 Microprocessor/Microcontroller setup. Some later carts do add SRAM (Static Random Access Memory).

Al's project to have an extremely small budget forced him to come up with a unique method to generate *Pong*'s on-screen scoring – but it lit a fire in Jerry. Jerry turned around and decided to develop his own video arcade game in his garage that he completed by early 1975, *Demolition Derby*. The game, which made its debut at a pizza place in Campbell, California was unique in two regards: First; it was designed by a single person. Second; it used one of Fairchild's new microprocessors, the F8. In fact it was done before Milwaukee, Wisconsin's David Nutting produced what's largely considered the first microprocessor-driven arcade game, Midway's *Gun Fight* (a version of Taito's discrete-driven *Western Gun*).

It can't be lost on you, the reader, how important this development was. Microprocessors were still extremely new to the coin-op industry and research was pretty much limited to trying to use microprocessors to control pinball machines. At a time when every arcade company was putting out discrete technology videogames, (games that are built entirely out of electronic logic circuitry) Jerry decided to build his around a microprocessor. *Demolition Derby*'s point of origin, being Jerry's garage, was also a traditional startup location for engineers of the time, something Jerry also became familiar with as a member of the now legendary Homebrew Computer Club. Using an actual CPU allowed Jerry to program the game vs hardwire it, but most importantly it would also unknowingly give him and ultimately Fairchild a head start in the consumer arena.

When Jerry had put his video arcade game test up at the pizza parlour, management at Fairchild found out about it. Upset at first with an employee doing a project like this on the side, they changed their minds quickly when they realised they could have Jerry take over from a contract with the firm Alpex, who they had designing their own videogame based around the Intel 8080 that was going sour. Soon, Jerry was heading a new videogame division, and with a sizable discretionary budget he began hiring new personnel to aid in reaching his vision: a fully programmable home videogame system based on the Fairchild F8.

"Jerry's creative and entrepreneurial juices also started young when he started building and selling walkie-talkies"

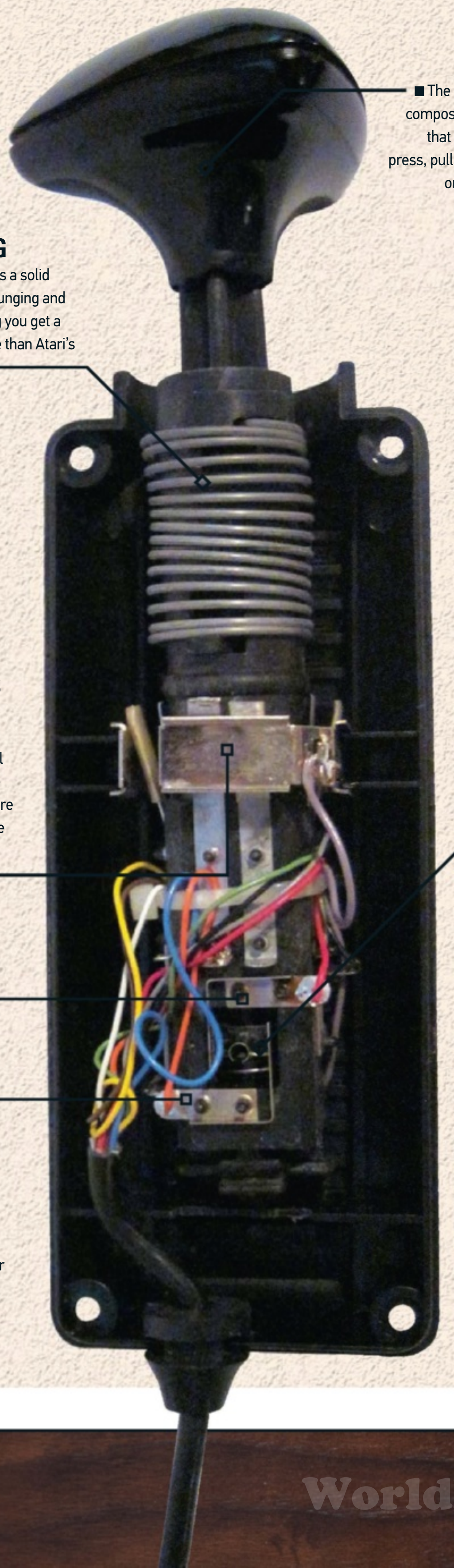
The Fairchild F8 is an 8-bit microprocessor, and an interesting one. Unlike most microprocessors it has no support for an address bus. The reason? The F8 is actually a microcontroller (a small self-contained computer) composed of two chips: a 3850 CPU chip and a 3851 Program Storage Unit (PSU) chip. The CPU, with 76 instructions, handles all the traditional CPU functionality (including I/O access) with the exception of external memory access (it does have 64 bytes of RAM directly on it, half of what Atari's Video Computer System would wind up having on its release). The PSU handles memory access and includes the program counter, stack counter and 1k of application specific ROM. At that time, microprocessor based systems required multiple support chips that each performed a specific function, so the ability to have an entire system contained on two chips made it more cost effective and very powerful for the time.

Because this home game system was going to be a consumer device, Jerry knew it was going to be very important to have the games reside in removable cartridges. To do this, Jerry was going to have to bypass a problem that most kids of today would have no clue of for an electronics device: sparks and static electricity. Unplugging live circuitry risked causing sparks, and if the user had any static electricity built up in themselves they could risk destroying the ICs of the system. So Jerry's mechanical engineers solved the problem, but it still had to get past the Federal ▶



INSIDE THE CONTROLLER

The inner workings of the Channel F's distinctive joystick



PLUNGER JOYSTICK HANDLE

■ The Channel F's controller handle is composed of a unique triangular shape that actually makes it easier to grip, press, pull and twist. Each tip is marked R or L to denote right or left player.

PLUNGER SPRING

■ The plunger spring creates a solid spring-back action for all plunging and pulling motions. When firing you get a much more tactile response than Atari's joystick Fire button.

ROTATIONAL POT AND CONTACTS

■ Rather than use an actual pot (potentiometer) as paddle games of the time did, the controller simulates the same pot functionality by providing two digital contacts that, when touched, denote turning right or left.

DIRECTIONAL CONTACT STRIPS

■ Digital in nature, the controller uses a unique contact mechanism that still allows it to rotate for paddle use. Four contacts in a square surround the stick and serve as contact points to denote different directions.

PUSH/PULL CONTACTS

■ The controller includes contacts for detecting when the plunger is either pushed (for firing) or pulled (used for unique motion for several other games).

CONTROLLER CONNECTOR

■ The controllers are hard wired to the system, meaning they can not be removed by the owner. However, their internal plug can be removed for servicing. The System II's controllers are removable however.

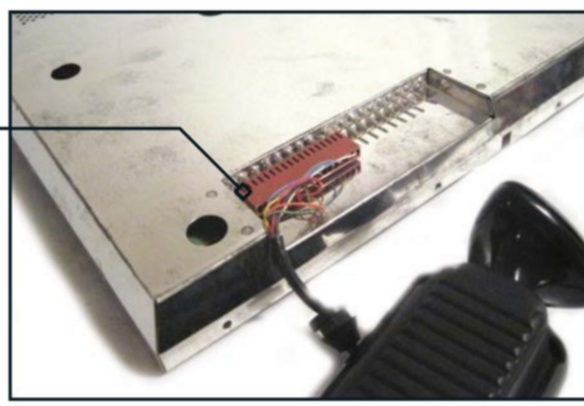


» The strange-looking controllers could be safely stored away in the console when not in use.

▶ Communications Commission (FCC – America's government agency responsible for consumer electronics devices certification). Testing on this alone was extravagant for the time because removable memory devices hadn't been done before for that very reason, and the FCC had to make sure things didn't spark, surge or even melt. Consequently, every single new cartridge had to be submitted to them for testing and in the end each cartridge, the cartridge bay and even the console itself had to be encased internally with a heavy metal shield to cut down on possible interference. Interestingly, it was Jerry and his team's pioneering work that showed Al Alcorn and his Video Computer System team the way past the same problems during their development.

The Channel F's controllers were the next unique aspect of the console, considering that all other game consoles of the time were paddle based. Jerry prototyped a digital controller that functioned as both a joystick and a paddle, giving the Channel F the best of both worlds – an eight-way digital controller in the shape of a baseless stick with no fire buttons. You manipulate the controller by gesturing in any of the eight axis directions of moving forward or back, right or left, twisting right or left and pulling up or pushing down. The last motion is often used for firing within games. Jerry's mechanical engineer, Ron Smith, took it from prototype to the final design and industrial design engineer Nicholas Talesfore created the casing and iconic look.

A business opportunity analysis report given to Fairchild on 26 November 1975 gives a rare look at the state of this pioneering console at that time. It was prepared by Gene Landrum, a consultant who







also went on to do a similar report for Atari and the VCS before he was hired by Atari and led the development of Nolan's Chuck E Cheese franchise. In it, the console is still referred to as the Alpex Video Game even though it had already been transferred to the F8, because it's still based around the initial Alpex console design. Likewise, the project itself is called 'STRATOS' and is described as "an electronic videogame aimed at the consumer home TV aftermarket. It is designed to eliminate the possibility of game obsolescence through the use of a 'unique' and hopefully patentable cartridge technique for adding additional games… The main console has a three-game configuration of *Ice Hockey*, *Tennis* and *Shooting Gallery*… Design provides for more exotic controllers such as a keyboard for mathematical, educational and gambling games or steering mechanisms for road races, tank games, etc"

The entire console was expected to be able to be delivered for a materials cost of $28.48 and a list price of around $100, and Fairchild would need to sell 12 – 15,000 units a month that first year to break even from the development and startup costs. The report predicted the US videogame market would grow from $112 million in 1976 to $240 million in 1980, and for Fairchild to sell close to millions of units by then.

With the prototype a success with the Fairchild brass and the analysis report looking promising, Jerry's industrial design engineer Nicholas F Talesfore began work on the casing of the console and cartridges. He came up with a design factor ubiquitous with mid-to-late Seventies entertainment centre decorum: faux wood grain and smoked plastic. Combined with garish bright yellow cartridges the size of eight-track tapes called Videocarts, they believed it would fit in with anybody's rec room veneer. Game programs on the console are selected via a method similar to how you would select tracks on an eight-track tape player, by selecting one of four large buttons (sometimes in confusing multi-button selections). The labels on the cartridges, designed by local artist Tom Kamifuji, feature mid-Seventies style pop art influenced by Peter Max and rounding out the presentation of the system. Instead of the planned three games, two games are built in to the system: *Tennis* and *Hockey*.

Fairchild's console was debuted at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago on 15 June 1976, sending a clear message to the press and the industry that the still *new* consumer videogame industry had just changed games again. Reviews were actually positive for the system, and many began questioning the relevance of the surplus of new *Pong* consoles entering the market at the time. The patent for the cartridge system was indeed filed for two months later, and final FCC approval of the unit came through in October, clearing the way for an official launch in November as the system hit store shelves at a retail price of $169.95. It must have been confusing for consumers though with the dual name of the system at launch; while the box said Channel F, the console had a nameplate with Video Entertainment System or VES. Popular myth had it that the name was changed with the release of Atari's Video Computer System (VCS or later known as the 2600) in 1977, however that's not the case. The confusion arises that the name changed to Channel F just before the system began being marketed and sold. Consequently, the label bar on the console's storage cover was never changed and the launch cartridges also state simply Fairchild on them while the outside packaging did state 'Channel F'.

Fairchild did a brisk OEM business for European companies over the next several years as the console was released throughout Europe as the Saba Videoplay (Germany), ITT Telematch (Germany), Normende Teleplay (Germany), Adman Grandstand (UK), Barco Challenger (Belgium), Dumont Videoplay (Italy) and Luxor Video Entertainment System (Sweden).

Unfortunately, compared to Atari's games on its new Video Computer System (which were mostly ports of its own coin-op games), the value and fun play just wasn't there. Fairchild released only 21 games before it decided to get out of the business. Electronics company Zircon wound up buying up the remaining stock including the briefly released cost-reduced Channel F System II. Zircon re-released the Channel F System II to the early Eighties videogame market along with five new cartridges and an ad campaign featuring Milton Berle, but the system didn't fare well and Jerry's legacy faded to obscurity. Jerry himself remained relatively unknown until being rediscovered during the early 21st Century, when he started making appearances at gaming conventions. He finally received the recognition he deserved when he was recognised by the industry at the International Game Developers Association conference in San Francisco, passing away only a month later on 9 April 2011.

"Because this home game system was going to be a consumer device, Jerry knew it was going to be very important to have the games reside in removable cartridges"



» A cool shot showing off the sheer size of the Channel F's Videocarts.

A special thanks to Jeffery Koss for the photographs used in this feature.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Command & Conquer: Red Alert

» **PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION » **DEVELOPER:** WESTWOOD STUDIOS » **RELEASED:** 1996

W **There's a reason Tanya has been the star of every entry in the *Red Alert* sub-series of *Command & Conquer* – she is a living rule-breaker in real-time strategy, undoing entire bases in a matter of seconds with C4 bombs that can automatically destroy buildings.** She's introduced in the original *Red Alert*'s first mission, where players get a taste of what she can accomplish when the enemy's defences are weakened, yet it's *Red Alert*'s highly addictive and ludicrously busy skirmish mode where the chaos really begins. Here, players can build entire units of Tanyas and throw the whole battle in a different direction in almost no time at all.

That's the thrill of Westwood's strongest ever strategy title, really – there is very little balance to affairs outside of who has the largest army of mammoth tanks or best setup of tesla coils, yet when the battles suddenly turn in your favour, the feeling of satisfaction is extraordinary. Tanya is *Red Alert*'s best representation of that unpredictable madness, a wildly silly idea that is also its most entertaining.

BIO

Command & Conquer: Red Alert explores an alternate history where Hitler never existed and the Soviet Union attempted to conquer Europe. In gameplay terms, that's represented by two warring sides, the Allies and the Soviets, both of which have their own colourful types of units that increase in power and novelty as you run through the necessary tech trees, straight into the territory of ludicrous sci-fi – helped along by daft live-action cut-scenes between missions. *Red Alert* combines spectacle with brilliantly accessible RTS mechanics – it should be both everyone's entry point into that genre and eventually, a lifelong obsession.



MORE CLASSIC RED ALERT MOMENTS

Monster Tank Madness



Red Alert's two expansion packs – or *Retaliation* as they're collectively known on PSone – by far contain the most interesting, high-concept missions of the game; in this case a scrap against robotic tanks that have gone rogue. Monster Tank Madness is epic; players have to capture a Soviet base with engineers, take a ship of units across the sea to reclaim an abandoned base before amassing all the tanks in the universe to take on the two iron curtain-protected monster tanks. A thrilling three-way battle ensues between the Allies, Soviets and AI-governed machines.

We've got an ant problem



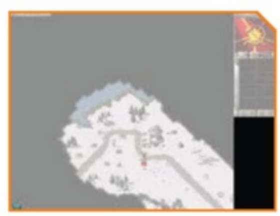
Red Alert's only and best Easter Egg: a series of missions hidden away where players have to contend with giant ants, some of which attack with elemental powers. This is probably the hardest part of the game, with missions escalating in the number of insects swarming around your bases and making short work of your men – fire ants, in particular, can quite easily total 20 units in one hit, and with resources lower than ever in the ant missions, it stings to see entire armies reduced to nothing by this mysterious foe. The screeching sound effect the ants make is rather horrible and a little bit creepy, adding an air of the bizarre to the *Red Alert* experience.

Allied cruisers save the day



This is from the game's opening Allies mission, where players first get a taste of the units they can unlock later in the game when they're flush with cash and tech. To wipe out the Soviet base at the end of the level, a squad of slow-moving, deadly cannon-touting Allied cruisers arrive and destroy every structure in a mere matter of hits. *Red Alert* is always at its best when you overload enemies with your most exotic weaponry – the Allied cruiser is probably the coolest vehicle in *Command & Conquer*'s roster. The simple and brilliant sound effect of explosives being brutally lobbed at your enemies is largely responsible for that appeal.

Nuclear civilians



The final mission of *Aftermath* and therefore *Red Alert* overall, Grunyev Revolution, turns one of the game's fundamentals on its head: that civilians are cannon fodder. Instead, they're turned into walking nuclear bombs and, after suffering a battering from a nearby village, you're implored to find reinforcements and regroup before these everyday folk embarrass you. An Allied base packed with the strongest tech available awaits you on the other side of the map as you fight against outrageous odds. It can be done – provided you're able to fend off these bystanders who now come armed to the teeth with weaponry.



THE HISTORY OF RAMBO® VIDEOGAMES

Packing food that would make a billy goat puke and a good supply of body bags, Martyn Carroll looks back at the various games based on the Rambo movies

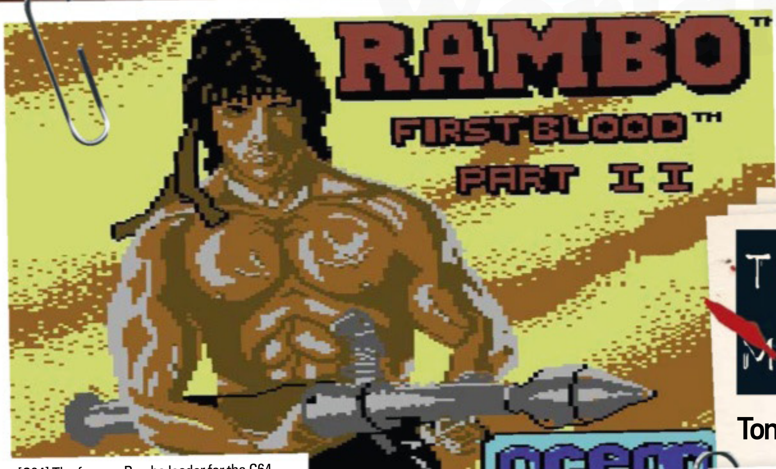


» [Spectrum] Fans of *Commando* would have been more than happy with Ocean's slick run-and-gun.

Action heroes don't come much bigger than John Rambo. Fewer still become so engrained in world culture. Rambo: listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, name-checked by President Ronald Reagan and – the ultimate accolade – parodied by 'Weird Al' Yankovic. He's a phenomenon.

The character was created by author David Morrell and first appeared in the novel *First Blood*, published in 1972. Ten years later this was turned into a movie of the same name starring Sylvester Stallone as Vietnam veteran Rambo. Two increasingly violent and jingoistic sequels followed before the decade was out, and these movies would inspire numerous action videogames. Some of them were official tie-ins, of course. To date, ten separate *Rambo* games have been released (11 if you include Mindscape's 1985 text adventure which better belongs in a feature entitled *The Ten Most Random Works Of Interactive Fiction*). And there's a new console and PC game too, shimmering on the horizon.

Rambo games have appeared on computers, consoles and coin-ops over the years. As you'd expect, the titles vary considerably in quality, ranging from direct hits to complete misfires. So let's get started. It's a long road, after all.



» [C64] The famous Rambo loader for the C64, coded by Bill Barna with music by Martin Galway.

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

- **FORMATS:** C64, AMSTRAD CPC, SPECTRUM
- **DEVELOPER:** OCEAN
- **YEAR:** 1986

OCEAN WOULD BECOME famous for its film licences, be they good, bad or ugly, and it all began with *Rambo*. This was the firm's first high-profile movie tie-in, and the task of replicating John Rambo's jungle rumble on home computers fell to Ocean's Tony Pomfret and Dave Collier.

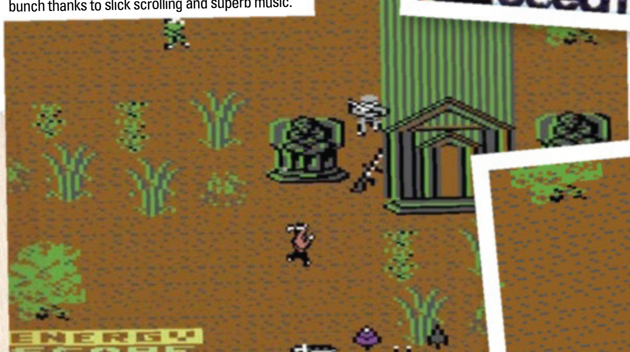
The pair had previously collaborated on *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and re-teamed to develop *Rambo* for the Commodore 64. The resulting game borrowed liberally from arcade hit *Commando* but, whereas Capcom's coin-op was a vertical-scrolling shooter, *Rambo* featured a playing area that scrolled in eight directions. Technically, it was top drawer.

Your mission was taken from the film's climax. You had to infiltrate the enemy base, free a bunch of prisoners and get them out in a chopper. It was short but sweet, and there was enough weaponry at your disposal to both pile up the bodies and flatten down the jungle. Where *Rambo* really excelled was in its presentation. Everything was supremely polished and the game featured one of Martin Galway's most memorable soundtracks. The loader music especially was a highlight, and ranks among the finest chip-tunes (SID or otherwise) ever composed.

The game's sound and graphics were a good showcase for the C64's capabilities, particularly as the other 8-bit versions weren't much cop in comparison. Ocean chose to outsource both conversions, with Platinum Productions and Choice Software handling the Spectrum and Amstrad versions respectively. On the Spectrum, Rambo's energy bar was replaced by lives making it more challenging (read: frustrating). The Amstrad version was closer to the C64 game, though jerky scrolling pretty much hobbled it. Both versions also introduced a whacking great status bar to the side of the screen, thereby shrinking the gameplay window and squandering the full-screen, full-on action of the Commodore original.



» [C64] Commodore's outing was the best of the bunch thanks to slick scrolling and superb music.





THE (MINI) MAKING OF RAMBO

Tony Pomfret discusses the creation of Ocean's iconic Rambo game



You programmed the game alongside Dave Collier. Did you also design it?
The concept was obviously inspired by key moments from the film, but yes, the design was down to myself and Dave. It all started with a trip to a preview screening at one of the large cinemas in Manchester. We eagerly noted every key event in the film and then came up with a design that featured them all.

Did any existing games influence the design?
It had a little design influence from *Commando*, a game we loved. I actually have a story about *Commando*. I was asked to accompany Jon Woods, one of the Ocean directors, to a meeting in London with Capcom to acquire the *Commando* licence. I came along to demonstrate our creative coding abilities. After doing my demo the big guns negotiated the financial details. We left the hotel with the deal in the bag – we thought! It transpired that our deal was gazumped by Elite Systems. So you could say *Rambo* was revenge!

One criticism levelled at the game is that it's quite short. Do you remember this being discussed at all during development?
We put as many aspects of the film in the game as we could in the given production time, which was about three months. Retrospectively, it would have been nice to have had a film-based adventure mode and a linear arcade mode but this would not be possible given the deadline and just two coders.



As *Rambo* was Ocean's first big film licence, did this put any additional pressure on you?
The only real pressure was the production deadline. I think the game came out shortly after the film's cinema release.

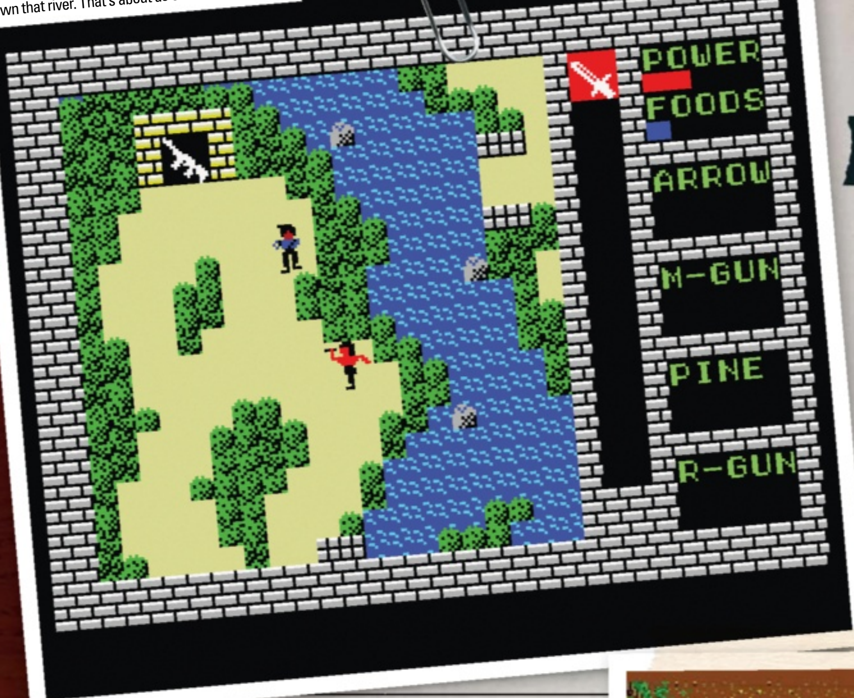
How pleased were you when you first heard Martin Galway's music for *Rambo*?
It was brilliant as per usual from Martin. The main title in particular was superb and had a hidden message in Morse code mentioning everybody who worked on the game.

> "It had a little design influence from Commando, a game we loved" Tony Pomfret

Looking back, was it a memorable experience working on *Rambo* or was it just another game to you?
It was very memorable. The game itself had a lot of great code tricks to get the C64 to handle a full-screen, eight-way scroll with a massive amount of sprite multiplexing. So no, not just another game. It was a pleasure to develop.

» [C64] Despite the small size of the sprite, Ocean did a good job of capturing Rambo's look.





» [MSX] You can get in a canoe and row up and down that river. That's about as exciting as it gets.

RAMBO

- **FORMAT:** MSX
- **DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO ● **YEAR:** 1985

WE'RE NOT QUITE sure what Pack-In-Video was thinking with this one. The Japanese developer evidently acquired some forgotten realm from a ropey RPG and spirited Rambo to it. Except it didn't even look like Rambo. The way he walked around, knife aloft – he looked more like Michael Myers from the *Halloween* movies.

The RPG comparison was merely visual. RPGs are meant to be deep time drains, yet it was possible to finish this game in around three minutes flat once you'd worked out what to do and where to go. And because the puzzles were simple and the map was small, that didn't take too long either. On a more positive note, there were three endings to see – one good and two bad, which played if you skipped certain objectives.

Special mention must be given to a couple of bizarre enemies. In addition to the many quiff-sporting guards, Rambo would also encounter a man-sized spider and a giant snake. They must have come as part of the forgotten realm package deal.

SUPER RAMBO SPECIAL

- **FORMAT:** MSX2
- **DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO ● **YEAR:** 1986

PACK-IN-VIDEO'S second *Rambo* game was developed for the superior MSX2 hardware. This allowed for more detailed, colourful graphics and a larger map – although it was flick-screen rather than scrolling and moving from one screen to another triggered an annoying pause.

It looked better than the MSX game but it actually played a good deal worse. The chief problem was the introduction of some wonky stealth elements. Enemy guards were only supposed to open fire when you crossed their line of sight but this rarely worked properly, so even if you were super careful you'd often attract a hail of bullets. Worse still, it was possible to enter a new screen and have your face blown off by a grenade before you had time to react. Lightening the mood somewhat was a comedy Rambo 'arrgghh' shout which played every time you died.

Including the words 'Super' and 'Special' in the title must have surely violated various international consumer laws at the time of release.



» [MSX2] Those blue flowers actually restore some of Rambo's health. That's right – magic flowers.


[Master System] Secure the area! Or rather, amble up the screen casually shooting people.

RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II

- **FORMAT:** MASTER SYSTEM
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ● **YEAR:** 1986

THERE'S AN INTERESTING history behind this copy of SNK's *Ikari Warriors*. It actually debuted in Japan under the title *Ashura* before being retooled and released in the US as a *Rambo* game. In other regions (including Europe) it was released sans licence as *Secret Commando* (or *Secret Command*, according to the famously awful box art).

All three versions played the same and played pretty well. You pushed up the screen, popping baddies who'd try and halt your progress. At the end of each stage, you blasted through a blockade using your explosive arrows and moved onto the next. You could also play co-op with a friend (in the US version, Player Two was a made-up Rambo clone named Zane).

It's a solid shooter, though a bit slow. Rambo and Zane seemed to be stuck in Sunday morning stroll mode. But neither *Ikari Warriors* nor *Commando* were released for the Master System, so for owners of the Sega console looking for a similar shooter this was a good bet.

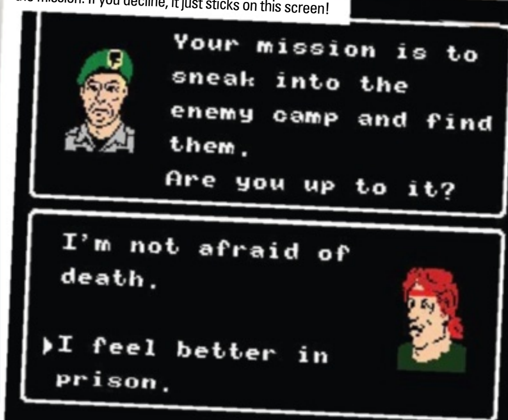
RAMBO

- **FORMAT:** NES
- **DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO ● **YEAR:** 1987

IT WAS A case of third time lucky for Pack-In-Video with this *Rambo* game for the NES. It certainly helped that the gameplay and graphical style borrowed heavily from Nintendo's *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*. Well, if you're going to rip something off, you might as well target a classic game.

As such, the game sported some basic role-playing features along with numerous elements that simply didn't belong in a *Rambo* tie-in. On entering the jungle at the beginning of the game you found yourself battling deadly dragonflies, poisonous snakes and hungry tigers. A little later on you'd be sent on a mission that seemingly involved rescuing Frodo Baggins from Shelob's Lair. At the end of the movie, you may remember, Rambo pins Murdoch to a table and threatens him with his knife. In the game, Rambo turns Murdoch into a frog by flinging a glowing symbol at him.

Yes, it was completely bonkers, but endearingly so, and much more entertaining than either of the earlier MSX games.



» [NES] To start the game, you actually have to agree to the mission. If you decline, it just sticks on this screen!





THE (MINI) MAKING OF RAMBO III

Graphics artist Ivan Horn lifts the lid on Ocean's adaption of the third Rambo movie

What was your role on *Rambo III*?
I had a fairly high involvement in the design so I guess my role was graphics and game design. But at that time, at Ocean at least, the role of designer didn't exist as we all tended to contribute to the design of the games we worked on to some extent. I designed the map layouts for the maze-style sections. I also remember we had a discussion in Gary Bracey's office about what the game should be, which is where I suggested the shooting section at the end.

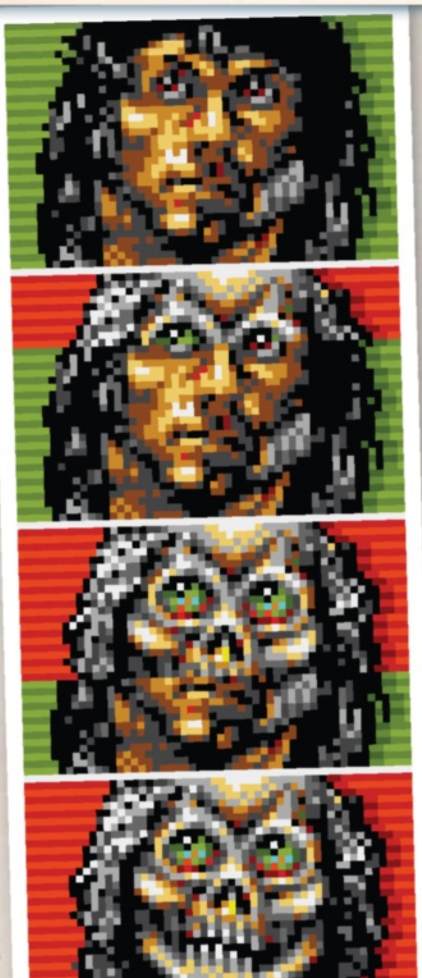
You'd previously worked on the home versions of *Operation Wolf*, so was the ending ins pired by that?
It was just a natural extension of the gameplay of *Operation Wolf*. I came up with the idea of using a set of scaled sprites to create the effect of enemies running towards the player. Probably something similar had been used on other combat games, but to me at least it was a new idea at the time.

> "This guy arrived with the film in a case literally handcuffed to him" Ivan Horn

And you were responsible for the graphics too?
I did all of the artwork for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions, but there was a collaboration on the 16-bit art. On those platforms I did the maze section artwork which was upgraded from my Amstrad art. This collaboration was unusual for Ocean at the time, as typically an artist and programmer would be assigned a platform of a new project and would work on it to completion. But this was different as it was our first attempt at 16-bit development internally.

Were you ever invited to view the movie?
They did show the film to those who would be working on the game. This occurred months before the release of the film and we viewed it at Manchester's Cornerhouse Cinema. What was amusing was that this guy arrived with the film in a case literally handcuffed to him. He then gave us a brief talk on the action and effects in the film before pausing, obviously waiting for a round of applause from our small group – which never came – before quickly sitting down, a little embarrassed!


» Former Ocean graphics whiz Ivan Horn.


[Amiga] As Rambo loses health his freaky skull is slowly revealed – just like the turkey from *Atic Atac*.

RAMBO III

- **FORMATS:** C64, CPC, SPECTRUM, MSX, AMIGA, ST, PC
- **DEVELOPER:** OCEAN • **YEAR:** 1988

HAVING SCORED A strong chart hit with the first *Rambo* game, it was predictable that Ocean would snap up the rights to the third film in the series. And it was equally unsurprising to find that the game would follow the multi-section approach that Ocean had started to favour for film licences.

The game was split up into three sections. In the first you had to raid an enemy fort and rescue Colonel Trautman. The fort was basically one big maze, crawling with enemy soldiers who followed predetermined paths. Some puzzles offered respite from all the killing; there were doors to unlock, for example, and infra-red traps for which you'd need special goggles to avoid. The maze was large and finding Trautman was a prolonged and fairly boring task. The second stage was similar in appearance, though there was more of an emphasis on action as you set about destroying the enemy compound by priming a number of explosives.

For the third and final stage the style switched to a 3D shoot-out, where soldiers and enemy vehicles rushed towards the screen. It was a fun end to the game and visually quite neat, through it's hard to imagine many people persevering through the first two stages to actually enjoy it.

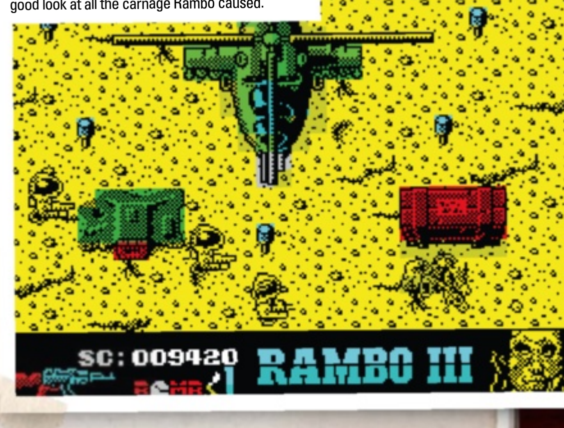
In addition to the 8-bit versions, the game was also released for the Amiga, ST and PC. Oddly, the 16-bit versions were barely upgraded over their 8-bit counterparts. The graphics were a touch improved, but the maze sections were still flick-screen rather than scrolling and Rambo's movement was noticeably slower.

All in all, *Rambo III* was a disappointment – much like the film itself. Multi-section titles were inherently clunky, yet Ocean showed with the likes of *Platoon* and *RoboCop* that the format could work to excellent effect.

[Amstrad CPC] Imagine *Into The Eagle's Nest* but with less Nazis and more John Rambo.



Spectrum] The top-down style allowed you to get a good look at all the carnage Rambo caused.



RAMBO III

- **FORMAT:** MASTER SYSTEM
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ● **YEAR:** 1988

THE MASTER SYSTEM received its very own *Rambo III* game, although it was hardly unique, being a straight-up clone of Taito's arcade hit *Operation Wolf*. It filled a gap at the time, however, as *Operation Wolf* wouldn't arrive on the Master System until 1990.

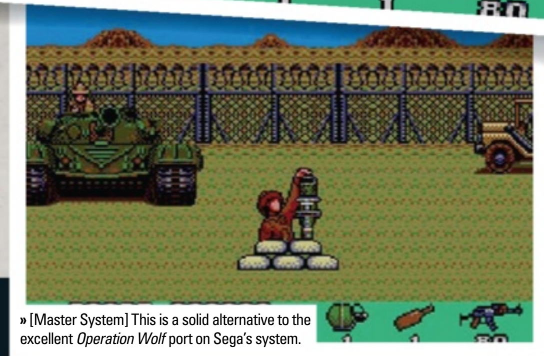
Everything was as you might expect from a lightgun game. The screen scrolled slowly to the right and you'd blast enemies who'd run onto the screen or pop up into view. Hostages and innocents would occasionally appear and you'd try (in vain) not to accidentally shoot them. Ammo was unlimited – if the ammo counter did hit zero, this just meant that you had to keep pulling the trigger to fire off shots rather than holding it down for a continuous burst.

There were no surprises – at least until the end. For the final stage, the viewpoint switched to a 3D one and you had to destroy enemy tanks and choppers. The game didn't exactly follow the plot of the film so it begs the question as to why there weren't more of these 3D sections and why they weren't featured earlier in the game to break up the relatively boring scrolling stages.

Like most lightgun games, you need to play this on the original hardware to properly appreciate it. Emulation just doesn't cut it.



» [Master System] With the Sega Light Phaser in hand, *Rambo III* is not a bad little shooter.


» [Master System] This is a solid alternative to the excellent *Operation Wolf* port on Sega's system.


» [Mega Drive] Take aim and fire, then scamper behind the rocks to avoid the gunship's missiles.

RAMBO III

- **FORMAT:** MEGA DRIVE
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA ● **YEAR:** 1989

HAVING KNOCKED OUT an *Operation Wolf* clone for the Master System version of *Rambo III*, Sega wisely chose a different tack for the Mega Drive release. The result was a solid, on-foot shooter that incorporated exploration and adventure elements.

Rambo's mission was to rescue Trautman and the action took place over six stages. You were armed with a machine gun and a never-ending supply of bullets – great for mowing down battalions of enemy soldiers. For more heavyweight targets, a limited number of bombs and explosive arrows were available. You also had a knife that appeared pretty pointless at first, until you discovered that knifing enemies often rewarded you with bonus items, so it was worth the risk if you encountered lone soldiers.

Breaking up the on-foot sections were shoot-out rounds were the viewpoint switched to over Rambo's shoulder. You had to take aim and take down enemy vehicles. The graphics here were great, a cut above those seen in the rest of the game, which were fairly basic by Mega Drive standards.

Overall the game exhibited a level of slickness and scale that was lacking in previous *Rambo* titles. *Rambo* was a massive licence after all and, here – for the first time – a developer rose to the challenge and delivered a fitting tie-in.

RAMBO III

- **FORMAT:** ARCADE (TAITO B SYSTEM)
- **DEVELOPER:** TAITO ● **YEAR:** 1989

RAMBO'S FIRST FORAY into the arcades came courtesy of Taito, and naturally the result was a shooter in the vein of its own *Operation Wolf*. It was not a lightgun game however. Rambo appeared on screen (along with Colonel Trautman in two-player mode) and the joystick would both move the character and the crosshair. As a result there wasn't much precise play required. You just ran left and right, shooting enemies and dodging their fire as best as you could

The first stage scrolled left to right while subsequent scenes saw you running 'into' the screen. At the end of each stage you faced an enemy onslaught led by an oversized and heavily-armed 'boss' vehicle. Here in particular the amount of fire rained in your direction was absurd and you had zero chance of escaping these battles unscathed. To reach the end of the game you had to keep it fed with so many credits that the whole thing felt a little unsavoury. *Rambo III* was certainly one of the strongest coin magnets in the arcade.

A prototype version of the game exists which omits both the side-scrolling opener and the motorbike stage. Taito obviously went back and beefed up the game prior to release. It's a shame it didn't tone down the difficulty at the same time.



» [Arcade] The best stage in the game sees you riding motorbikes into battle.

» [Xbox 360] For the first time in a game, Rambo gets to deal with weekend warriors in good ol' Jerkwater USA.



RAMBO

- **FORMAT:** ARCADE (SEGA LINDBERGH HARDWARE)
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA · **YEAR:** 2008

***RAMBO* AS A** property would lie mostly dormant until 2008 when a fourth film, simply titled *Rambo* in most regions, was released in cinemas. In the same year, Sega re-acquired the licence for an arcade lightgun game. Strangely, the coin-op had nothing to do with the new movie. It instead took the most memorable action sequences from the second and third films and made them even more excessive and outrageous than they already were.

There was no cover mechanic or anything as prudent as that. You just blazed bullets at anything that moved, pausing momentarily to shoot outside of the screen to reload your machine gun. For added amusement there was a 'rage' meter that filled up when you dispatched enemies quickly and accurately. Once maxed out and unleashed, you'd hear the Rambo battle cry and you became even more of an indestructible war machine than before.

It was breathless, ludicrous and brilliant. It even spliced the action with actual footage from the films. Why Sega didn't convert it to consoles is baffling. Wii got *Ghost Squad* and PS3 got *The House Of The Dead 4*, so why didn't *Rambo* make it home?



» [Arcade] Targets display an 'aiming' timer, giving you a brief moment to hit them before they open fire.



> **"The team has done extensive research into every Rambo game"** Jas Marwaha

RAMBO: THE VIDEO GAME



- **FORMATS:** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, PC
- **DEVELOPER:** TEYON · **YEAR:** 2013

A NEW *RAMBO* game is heading to consoles and PC. Developed by Teyon and published by Reef Entertainment, *Rambo: The Video Game* is based on the original trilogy of films.

The game is best described as an on-rails shooter, yet Reef's Jas Marwaha reveals that there is more to it than that: "The game also features a cover system and a timing-based reload system to create authentic *Rambo* gameplay. In the films Rambo often pops out from cover, shooting from the hip, and we wanted to stay close to this. Also, Rambo never runs out of ammo in the films so we've created a 'rapid reload' system. In addition, there are stealth sections and Quick-Time Events to keep players on their toes."

The game's arcade nature also lends itself to score attacking. "Pushing for high scores is a major part of the game", says Jas. "We have created combo systems and bonuses that really reward skilful, aggressive play that we feel embodies the *Rambo* spirit. There will be an array of online leaderboards so that people can compare scores."

It will certainly be interesting to see how the first movie is approached. No game has yet tackled *First Blood*, which is obviously not as comic book and gung-ho as the sequels. Jas says: "For *First Blood* we looked at options for the player to stun the cops or disarm rather than straight out kill them and this type of play will yield rewards. We also decided to recreate some of the key scenes – for example where Rambo breaks free from the police station at the beginning – as Quick-Time Events. We like games that have breaks to their core gameplay to give a change of pace."

The prospect of an on-rails shooter featuring Quick-Time Events and stealth elements may not immediately grab you, and the gameplay reveal trailer didn't exactly alleviate concerns. And as this feature shows, it's not difficult to make a duff *Rambo* game. Yet Jas assures us that the developers have done the required homework. "The team has carried out extensive research into every *Rambo* game," he says. "We wanted to see what elements they got right and to see if they really captured the true *Rambo* essence. So I can definitely say we did our research and really enjoyed it."

***Rambo: The Video Game* will be released at the end of 2013.**

» [Xbox 360] Hopefully, *Rambo: The Video Game* will be just as over-the-top as the later movies.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

VAPOR TRX

■ **Developer:** Atari Games / Blue Shift Inc ■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Genre:** Sci-Fi Racer

■ ***Vapor TRX*** **was one of the last coin-ops to display an Atari logo, and given that the Atari story began in Sunnyvale, CA, it seems only right that a team of California-based developers created the game.**

Blue Shift Inc is better known for its console sports titles of the early 21st Century, but during the Nineties coin-ops were still relatively big business, and 1998 saw Blue Shift developing *Vapor TRX* for Atari Games.

With hindsight, *Vapor TRX* can be seen as one last hurrah for the arcades and the Atari name that coin-ops had once been so synonymous with, but it should also be given credit for being a decent game in its own right. To be fair, *Vapor TRX* couldn't be accused of being greatly innovative or original, but where it does excel is in its delivery of unpretentious thrills and spills. In terms of gameplay, it clearly wouldn't be fair to not name-check the seminal sci-fi racer *WipEout* as *Vapor TRX*'s primary influence. But given the arcade environment it competed in, it's hardly surprising that Blue Shift's creation also incorporates the coin-devouring checkpoint mechanic used in so many Sega coin-op racers.

Vapor TRX deviates from the *WipEout* blueprint in several other respects. Perhaps as a nod to the old Atari creed of 'easy to play, hard to master', the game offers four different tracks of increasing difficulty rather than adopting the sink or swim approach of its inspiration. The addition of limitless weaponry to the game's various craft makes the title's difficulty curve smoother still, and also gives you a chance against the game's interactive and unpredictable scenery.

This is actually an area where *Vapor TRX* outdoes *WipEout*, as each of its different tracks snake through a themed natural or manmade landscape rather than keeping the player on rails and apart from their surroundings. It's a mechanic that works well, as it introduces inanimate objects into the mix – some to avoid, some to shoot, some to smash through – which sits perfectly with the title's fairground-ride style of gameplay. Unfortunately, it's likely that these arcade sensibilities are at least partly to blame for the lack of a home version; the game simply wouldn't have represented long-term value to home gamers. That's not to say that *Vapor TRX* tarnishes the Atari name, in fact it provides something that so many classic Atari coin-ops did – an unashamed thrill ride.





CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

F-ZERO AX 2003

An equivalent coin-op sci-fi racer that did get converted is the Nintendo/Sega collaboration *F-Zero AX*. It was adapted for the GameCube and renamed *F-Zero GX*, but an Action Replay can unlock the full arcade version.



» The scenery in *Vapor TRX* is both interactive and unpredictable; you often have to make split-second decisions to avoid it, shoot it or smash into it.

» Whatever else a coin-op achieves, its main concern should be to make a profit. *Vapor TRX* covers this by incorporating a coin-munching checkpoint mechanic.

» The various craft that you pilot are equipped with limitless firepower. Their weaponry can be upgraded by skilfully collecting hard to reach power-ups.

» The four tracks offered by *Vapor TRX* each have their own themes and vary in difficulty. The 'Medium' level takes place in an impressive futuristic cityscape.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

SKY RAIDER

■ **Developer:** Atari Inc ■ **Year:** 1978 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



■ **First, the positives; *Sky Raider* looks incredible and is really quite technically advanced for a game from 1978.** The game's creators, Dave Shepperd, Lyle Rains and Steve Bristow, even took out a patent on the system they had developed to run the game on. In terms of visuals, it's probably as ahead of it time as Atari's early vector titles, which is impressive given that those didn't start appearing until 1979. So why was it left in the arcades? Well, there were likely two reasons for this. Firstly, home systems of the late Seventies just weren't up to replicating *Sky Raider*'s detailed, smooth-scrolling landscapes, and secondly, the title was sorely lacking in gameplay. While it may look like a prototypical *Zarch*, *Sky Raider* offers far less of a challenge than David Braben's Archimedes shooter. In fact, the game can be described in just two words: bomb things. Your ground and air-based targets don't shoot back so your objective is confined to navigating a crosshair and dropping bombs. *Sky Raider* simply doesn't do jeopardy, instead you get a timer and a high score chase. It's a technical achievement, but wouldn't have had enough game to reach the home market.

CLOAK & DAGGER

■ **Developer:** Atari Inc ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Fixed Shooter



» [Arcade] Risk and reward stealth-based mechanics make this a very interesting twin-stick shooter.

■ **It wasn't really until the mid-Eighties that Hollywood realised that videogame versions of its films might generate publicity for its big-screen efforts.** *Cloak & Dagger* was an early movie tie-in, but also part of a fad where movies featuring videogames were also made into videogames – better-known examples being *Tron* and *The Last Starfighter*. *Cloak & Dagger* began life as *Agent X* before being retitled to match the name of a film that was in production. Plans were made for an Atari 5200 version, and indeed, the system and a *Cloak & Dagger* cartridge feature in the film – except the cart was actually a prop and game footage relied on the coin-op. Atari's subsequent financial fortunes saw the actual 5200 version shelved, which is a shame. The title does have annoying cut-scenes, but get past these and you'll find a varied set of challenging levels. Although it lacks the immediacy and adrenaline-pumping highs of its most easily comparable contemporary, *Robotron: 2084*, *Cloak & Dagger*'s risk and reward stealth-based mechanics make for a very interesting twin-stick shooter.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ROBOTRON: 2084 1982



Cloak & Dagger runs on the same hardware as *Robotron: 2084*. It's visually similar and shares its control system. It demands a different mindset, but the *Robotron* 5200 port is a decent alternative to a *Cloak & Dagger* home version.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

BATMAN FOREVER 1996



Four years and two movies later, Acclaim released this high-tempo scrolling fighter. It's bigger and louder, but similar enough thematically to be a suitable alternative. Play it on Saturn, PlayStation or Windows.

BATMAN

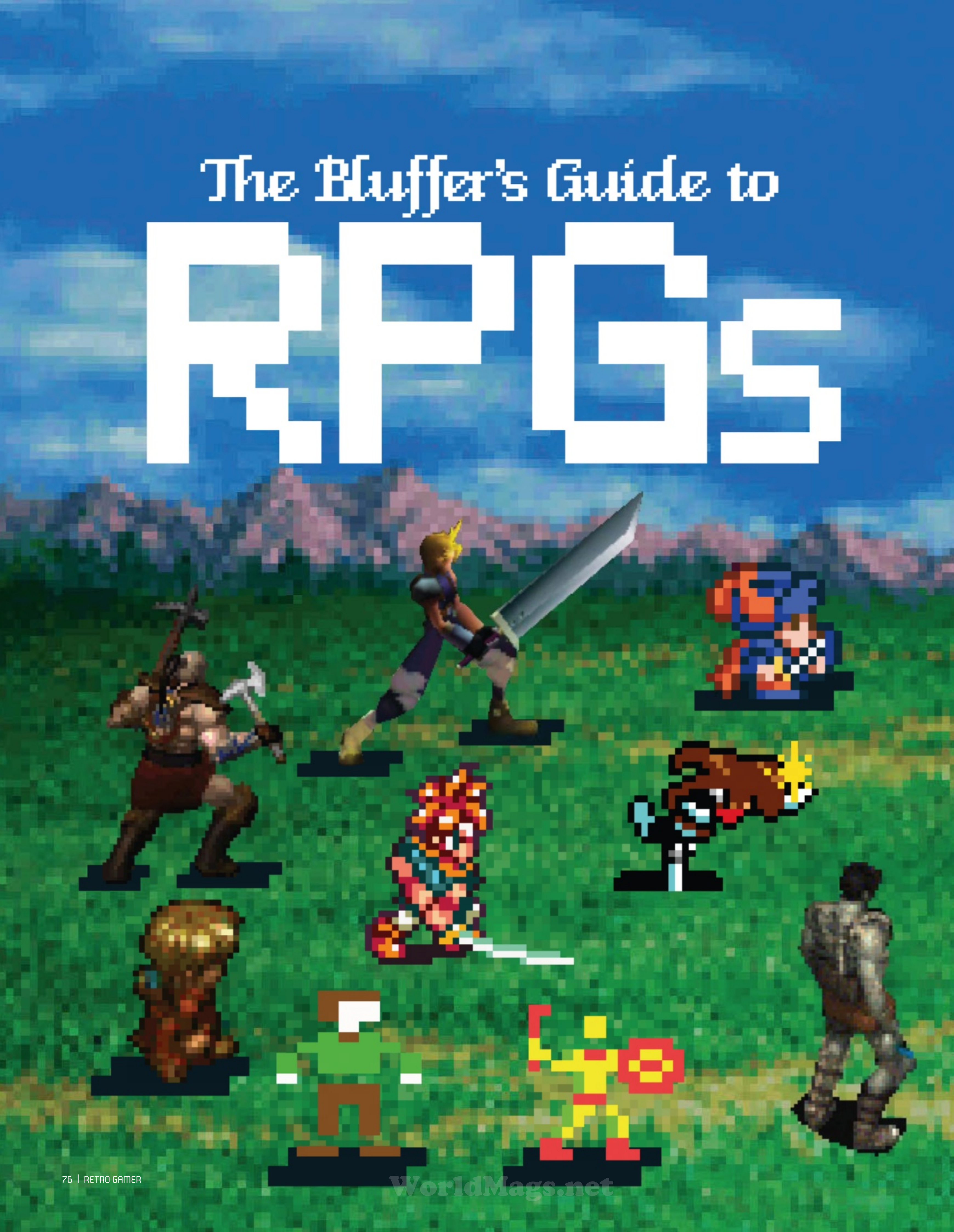
■ **Developer:** Atari Games/Numega ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling beat-'em-up



» [Arcade] The Dark Knight takes on the Joker in one of the game's many cinematic set pieces.

■ **DC's Dark Knight has a pretty good rep when it comes to videogame outings, possibly because the character lends himself so well to so many gaming genres, or perhaps because his copyright holders are selective in their licensing.** Whatever the reason, Numega and Atari Games's take on Tim Burton's movie follows this successful trend, with a mix of enjoyable scrolling beat-'em-up stages and into-the-screen fire fights featuring the Batmobile. If this brief description sounds familiar, it's likely because it fits the games based on the same film but coded for home systems. This may be true, but the coin-op actually plays very differently to the home versions. Its gameplay might share the same genres, but that gameplay is far more fast and loose. The game's more advanced hardware also allows for more cinematic set pieces. The reason for the likes of Ocean not converting the game but instead producing its own film tie-ins from scratch may well be to down to finances. After all, why pay for the rights to the film *and* the rights to the coin-op when it could just pay for the movie licence?

The Bluffer's Guide to RPGs



With obsessive fans, a slew of subgenres, locations ranging from high fantasy to hard sci-fi, convoluted stats and a range of combat systems, RPGs truly come in flavours to appeal to all tastes. Craig Ritchie looks back over the decades-long history of one of gaming's oldest and most revered genres



The story of computer and console role-playing games begins offline, as one could imagine, with Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's *Dungeons & Dragons*. Combining the nerdy delights of Tolkien-esque high fantasy complete with magic, elves, and hobbits – sorry, halflings – with the obsessive attention to detail present in tabletop wargaming, *D&D* immediately won over hearts and minds when it was released in 1974. It was intended for an audience already familiar with the tabletop wargaming scene, and because its original incarnation did not specify exactly how combat should be played out, as *D&D* spread throughout North America and eventually the world it turned out that play varied depending on where you were and how the local gamers had decided to interpret the rules and implement their own combat. It would actually take a while for the original fantasy RPG that gave rise to so many games since to have its own hard set of rules that were globally adapted.

As anyone who has played a tabletop or pencil and paper role-play game can tell you, dealing with all of those dice rolls, keeping track of all your hit points, manually managing your inventory and mapping out everything by hand can be both a tedious and tiring experience. Maybe some of us are just spoiled by technology (read: lazy), but here at Retro Towers we prefer letting a computer take care of all those finicky details and thus reduce a battle from 30 minutes to 30 seconds. Thankfully, some tech-minded fans of *D&D* felt the same.

As history has shown, the kind of person that is drawn to tabletop wargaming, fantasy role-playing and all of the statistics, rules and number crunching involved is also the kind of person who would tinker with computers or spend their time programming, and digital incarnations of *D&D* started appearing as early as 1975. Some of the first releases include *pedit5*, *dnd* and *Dungeon*, and were comprised of simple simulations of the *D&D* experience coded and then played on terminals connected to a PDP-10 or PLATO mainframe. Rusty Rutherford, author of *pedit5*, spent just over a month producing what is now regarded as the oldest ▶

CLASSIC RPG CLICHES

There's a lot of things about this genre that developers take for granted. Here are some of the most notable

YOUNG HERO WAKES UP IN BED!

■ It seems that a good night's rest and a solid sleep are essential prerequisites before you can get down to some good ol' questin' fun, and this is where many a game begins. You get bonus points if you awaken to your mum/wisened-old-man guardian calling to you from downstairs.



THE ENEMY IS… YOUR BROTHER!

■ What!? [surprised face] All this time, the arch-enemy is none other than the brother you never knew you had, that no-one told you about and that you had absolutely no idea existed until this great revelation! Also, he might only be your half-brother. But never your sister. That would be totally unorthodox.



LIGHTING A CAMPFIRE OR SLEEPING IN A TENT EQUATES TO A STAY IN HOSPITAL!

■ Yes, somehow having a bite to eat and a good kip next to the fire can heal all wounds, mend broken limbs and, in rare cases, even cure diseases and poison. Top tip: if camping under the stars is not your thing, erecting a tent on a dungeon floor can be just as effective.



CONVENIENT TREASURE CHESTS!

■ So you've made it all the way through multiple levels of a dungeon, survived a host of battles and are down to your last healing potion with only three mana points left. Good thing, then, that the boss you're about to fight has left a chest full of replenishing items just outside his door for you to help yourself to!



WE HAVE A VERMIN PROBLEM – AND YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE!

■ Before you can save the world, it is obligatory to clear out a basement full of rats. This is non-negotiable and any would be adventurers hoping to attain the status of Hero Of All The Land first has to complete this pest control rite of passage.



HI STRANGER, HERE'S MY LIFE STORY!

■ One staple of many RPGs is the abundance of NPCs who are willing to immediately tell a complete stranger every single thing about themselves – their life story, their hopes and dreams, their greatest fears – a few seconds into initiating their first conversation ever.



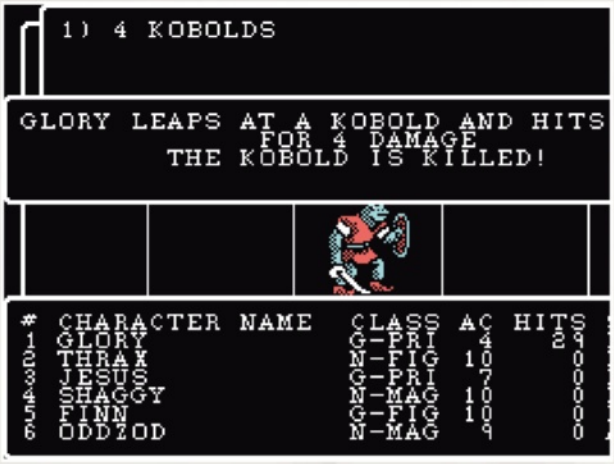
HI STRANGER, WE ENTRUST YOU WITH OUR SURVIVAL!

■ Fantasy and sci-fi worlds are chock full of people who are more than happy to task you with saving them from an evil overlord, fending off an undead horde or basically any task that means they don't have to bother with any kind of collective action.



▶ playable computer RPG. Sporting a simple graphical representation of the dungeon you're exploring, as well as listing your character stats, spells, inventory and so on, *pedit5*'s name is derived from the files allocated by the Population and Energy Group, for whom Rusty was working as a PLATO programmer. While the strict limitations on storage meant that he was not able to implement as much as he would have liked to, the game was nevertheless very popular and can still be experienced today via PLATO emulators running on the web. Perhaps the most incredible thing to take away is that, despite being one of the first of its kind and now almost 40 years old, much of the interface and overall presentation of the game can still be seen in modern RPGS.

The next milestone in early computer RPGs would again come from students trying to use their college's serious hardware for mucking about in games. This time round, unlike PLATO and similar systems, the games would be built on terminals without any graphical capabilities. It was 1980, and the combined efforts of Glenn Wichman and Michael Toy led to the grandfather of the traditional dungeon crawler: *Rogue*. Using a simple interface made up of numbers, letters and symbols to represent the player, the dungeon and its inhabitants, *Rogue* saw players venturing deeper and deeper into a dungeon to retrieve the Amulet of Yendor, fighting monsters, picking up items and generally just trying to survive in the *D&D*-themed world. Glenn and Michael also



» [PC] It may look rather basic, but *Wizardry* was a very important evolution of the genre for many gamers.

added in the ingenious element of procedurally generating a new dungeon every time the game was played, and made the challenging game even more unforgiving by implementing permadeath: once your little @-symbol hero died, that was it. Time to start again in an entirely new, randomised dungeon. The challenge of permadeath and the replayability brought about by procedural generation has seen the entire subgenre known as roguelikes persist as a niche area of computer RPGs that is proving timeless. From the earliest roots in *Rogue* itself and then the commercial adaptation *Telengard*, through to modern incarnations such as *Dungeons Of Dredmor*, *Rogue Legacy* and hundreds of derivative mobile phone games. Even Blizzard's iconic *Diablo* series clearly has its roots planted in Glenn and Michael's classic.



» [SNES] Colourful and packed with personality, *Secret Of Mana* tops the SNES' action-RPG lineup.

» [PC] *Bards Tale III* continued the epic adventuring that gamers had first fallen in love with.



It was around the same time that *Rogue* was gaining popularity that gamers saw the emergence of the good old first-person dungeon crawler. The biggest name, and arguably most important and influential title from the early Eighties, was *Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord*, developed by Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead. Released in 1981 by Sir-Tech Software, this was high fantasy fare that brought a Tolkien-inspired *Dungeons & Dragons*-flavoured world to home computer gamers. It presented a simple but unique 3D perspective – *Wizardry*'s graphics were little more than primitive lines marking walls, passageways and so forth – but in 1981 this was enough to allow players to become completely immersed in the world as they guided their party of adventurers through ten labyrinthine levels of traps, puzzles and monsters before battling the evil wizard Werdna. *Wizardry* differed from *Rogue* and its ilk not just in the player's perspective, but also in the fact that it had carefully crafted mazes to explore complete with scripted encounters and intentionally paced progression of challenge. It



» [NES] The *Dragon Quest* games' simple tile-based worlds went on to define a generation of RPGs.

also presented a menu-based interface that is still a staple in many console RPGs to this day. Incidentally, the early titles in Richard Garriot's *Ultima* games, also very successful, followed *Wizardry*'s formula before changing to the isometric view more commonly associated with the series. While one of the most successful at the time, *Wizardry* may not have been the very first but it was the most popular, and went on to boast the greatest legacy. The very similar PLATO-based *Oubliette* came out earlier and its direct influence can be seen in *Wizardry*'s spell names, interface and more, but of course more people had Apple IIs and Commodore 64s in their homes than had access to mainframes running PLATO, and it went on to be one of the best selling computer games of the era.

After an early-Eighties surge, the first-person dungeon crawler would continue its popularity for close to 15 years, with various games combining either real-time or turn-based combat with the genre's staple exploration and puzzle solving. For many years players also needed to keep a stack of graph paper around for hand-drawing and annotating their own maps. This was essential for beating most of these titles, and was a far more efficient approach to the game than endlessly wandering the halls and mazes while trying, often vainly, to commit all the locations to memory. *The Bard's Tale III: Thief Of Fate*, released in 1988, added an auto-mapping feature, and was quickly followed by *Might And Magic II* offering the same, provided one of your characters possessed the cartography skill. This was a momentous addition to the genre, yet even though it was so obviously useful and popular, some games opted to forego it and stick to the more traditional 'draw-your-own' option.

Landmark titles in the first-person dungeon crawler line include *Dungeon Master*, *Bloodwych*, and the award-winning *Eye Of The Beholder* series (well, the first two at least must-plays), and we have to give a special nod to *Wizardry 8*, the series' outstanding final outing from 2001. The subgenre's popularity persists today as evidenced by the popularity of Atlus's *Etrian Odyssey* series and the



"Wizardry may not have been the very first but it was the most popular"

success of Almost Human Games's *Legend Of Grimrock*, released in 2012, as well as the fan anticipation for the upcoming *Might And Magic X* set for release in 2014.

While we're on the subject of *Wizardry*, it's time to head over the Pacific and appreciate what an absolute hit the series was, and still remains, in Japan. There are now far more Japanese titles and spin-offs in the series than the eight core titles released in the West, including Game Boy Color remakes of the first three games, plus non-gaming tie-ins such as manga and anime productions. *Wizardy*'s significance in Japan is also marked by what would go on to be one the most important encounters with the game, when one Koichi Nakamura picked it up early in his own games development career. Together with Yuji Horii,



» [NES] Over 25 years on, the original *Final Fantasy* still has all of its original charm.

NO IMPORT? NO PROBLEM

The hardcore fans who are providing solutions to Japanese exclusive RPGS



Many of the most highly acclaimed console RPGs never saw a release outside of Japan, meaning that unless you had a basic grasp of Japanese and could read Kanji, there was a lot of adventuring that Westerners were missing out on. With the proliferation of console ROMS appearing online in the late Nineties, fan translation projects of everything from the major series to the most obscure titles got underway. Through standardised patching methods, it's now easy to hack a ROM and experience these classics in your native tongue. Among our favourites is the fan translation of the third *Dragon Warrior* (née *Quest*) game, where the superb SNES version never saw an English release. As far as we're aware, hacking the Japanese ROM (legally, mind you) is the best way to play this game – and yes, even better than the excellent Game Boy Color remake.

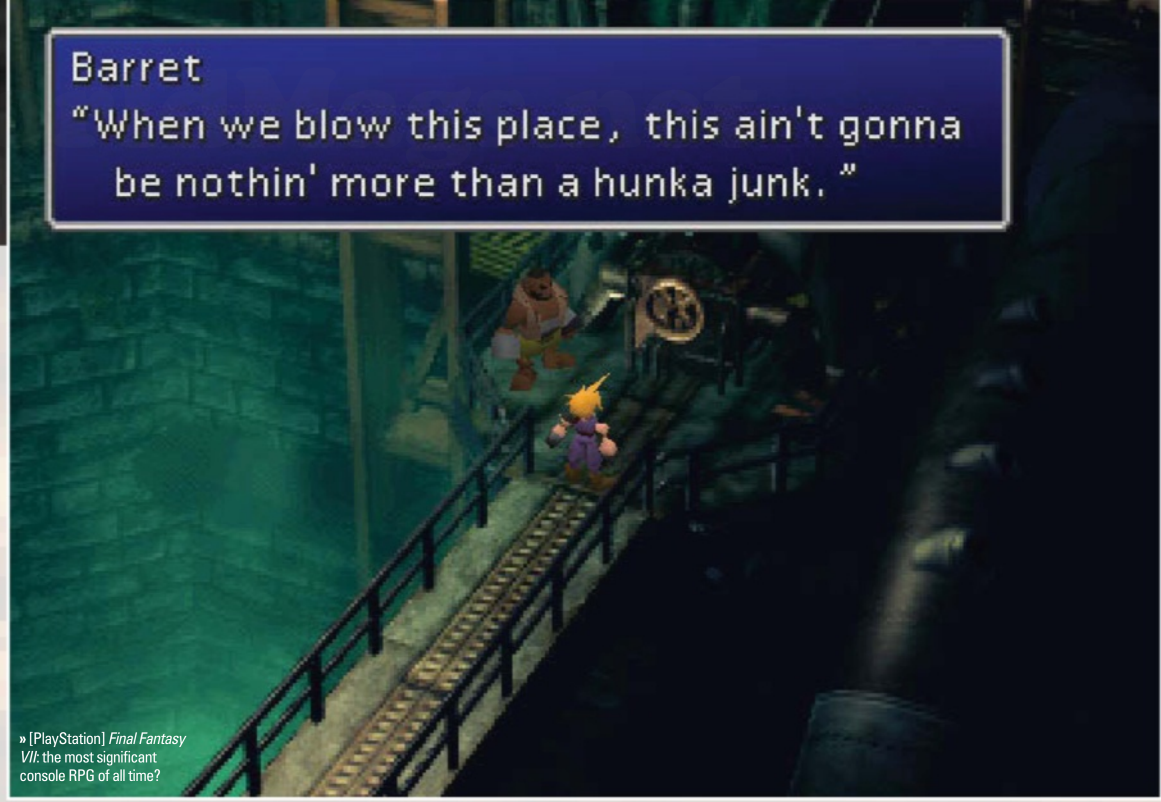
» [PC] *Eye Of The Beholder* was an RPG that did a fantastic job of capturing early *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures.



who was a keen player of the early *Ultima* games, Nakamura would go on to make the grandfather of the Japanese RPG, *Dragon Warrior*. RPGs were gaining popularity in Japan thanks to titles such as *Dragon Slayer* and *Bokosuka Wars* seeing great commercial success, and the duo decided to work on their own vision of a role-playing game.

Released on the Famicom (NES over here) in May 1986, this *Wizardry*-inspired yet visually and functionally very different beast laid the foundation for a long line of RPGs that were, and still are, wholly distinct from what we generally see released outside of Japan, so much so that it helped give rise to what is now referred to as the Japanese RPG, or JRPG. *Dragon Quest*, originally titled *Dragon Warrior* when it was first released in the West, introduced role-playing gamers to the brightly coloured tile-based overworld adventuring, the random combat encounters and that element of cuteness and juvenile frivolity within a much darker overall plot that, despite technological advances, persist to this day as staples of the genre. Indeed, you only have to look at 'the other JPRG franchise' to see all of these characteristics at play: *Final Fantasy*.

Sharing many common traits with *Dragon Quest*, down to similarities in the appearance of the tile-based world, the management of inventory and the similar combat mechanics, *Final Fantasy* saw players guiding a small party of young adventurers known as the Light Warriors on their quest to defeat the Four Elemental Fiends and the demonic entity Chaos. This theme of a band of youngsters tasked with saving the world would run through much of the series, with the *Final Fantasy* games often telling coming-of-age stories highlighting the character's fears, hopes, dreams and personal emotional turmoils. This added depth to the characters introduced a new level of empathy that many RPG players were not used to. Instead of player-created characters that were little more than a list of stats, now gamers were controlling living, breathing beings that could be identified with, and in turn empathised with. RPGs had made the shift from having a basic storyline or bit of a plot serving as



» [PlayStation] *Final Fantasy VII*: the most significant console RPG of all time?

▶ a vehicle to fight monsters and level up your heroes to being full-fledged stories with richly developed characters. There are plenty of stories of *Final Fantasy* having brought gamers to tears, with the most cited moment being *that* bit in *Final Fantasy VII*. Role-playing games had fundamentally changed, and the emphasis on characterisation would go on to influence games the world over, with a more human side appearing in all but the most stern adherents to the basic dungeon-crawling formula.

The most incorrectly named franchise in gaming, *Final Fantasy* has now seen 14 games in the main series (with *FFXV* in the works for the PS4 and Xbox One) as well as countless spin-offs, tie-ins, strategy games and tactical RPGs that cover almost every home system since the original game was released on the Famicom in late 1987. *Final Fantasy* is also responsible for bringing in countless innovations to the genre over the years, from the hybrid real-time/turn-based combat of their patented Active Time Battle system, the opportunity for a character to change classes or 'Jobs', and the experimental move from the standard level-based system to a skills-based system. The latter saw a shift from the traditional 'level-up with enough experience points' to a scenario where only those skills or attributes that were actively used would improve. This particular novelty can now be seen in the likes of the *Elder Scrolls* series.

Just as *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* were rising to popularity in Japan, back in the United States things were coming full circle when the original inspiration for many of these games, *Dungeons & Dragons*, saw a string of official CRPG outings of its own. Produced by SSI, who were better known for complex and realistic war games, the series kicked off with the very successful *Pool Of Radiance*, the first in what would go on to be known as the Gold Box games. It combined the pen-and-paper *Advanced D&D* ruleset, the popular *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting and first-person exploration that switched to turn-based isometric tactical combat during encounters. After a great critical and fan reception, SSI went on to release a total of 14 titles that spanned the *Dragonlance*, *Forgotten Realms*, *Spelljammer* and *Buck Rogers* campaigns. The final title was 1993's *Forgotten Realms: Unlimited Adventures*, which was essentially a Gold Box construction kit, and there are now hundreds of freely available campaigns to be downloaded from frua.rosedragon.org, some of them being of such high quality that they rival SSI's originals.

It was around the time that the Gold Box series was winding down that computer gaming was making the famous shift towards the first-person shooters and real-time strategy games that dominated during the Nineties. PC, Amiga and Atari ST users still enjoyed a number of great RPGs at the time, with

"Final Fantasy has now seen 14 games in the main series"

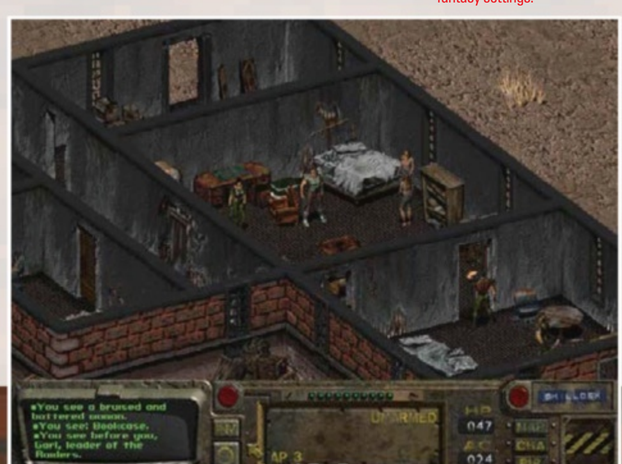
the likes of *Eye Of The Beholder* and the outstanding *Ultima VII*, with genre stalwarts *Might And Magic* and *Wizardry* also seeing a few releases. Yet despite these noteable titles, RPGs had, for the most part, found their home on consoles, and the SNES, Mega Drive and before too long Sony's PlayStation were becoming the systems of choice for dedicated RPG grinders.

Console RPGs largely followed the formulas laid out in *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*, with noteable titles including Sega's flagship *Phantasy Star* and Capcom's long-standing *Breath Of Fire* series. The outstanding *Chrono Trigger* is a must-play title from the era, bringing in a number of minor changes to the basic formula that, together with its unforgettable characters, reactive world and multiple endings, see the game firmly planted on the top of many 'Best Ever' lists. RPGs were also branching out and experimenting with different takes on the genre, including the addition of arcade elements in real-time action RPGs with the likes of *Secret Of Mana*, or combining adventuring and puzzle-solving with RPG elements as was



» [Game Boy Color] King of the collect-em-ups, *Pokémon* has sold more copies than any other franchise beside *Mario*.

» [PC] *Fallout*'s richly detailed post-apocalyptic world was a perfect stray from normal fantasy settings.



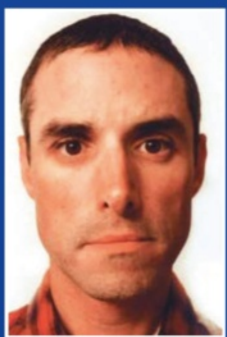
the case with the timeless *Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, which straddles a range of genres (it's RPG enough for us). Around the same time, the more cerebral tactical and strategy RPGs that included the *Shining Force* and *Fire Emblem* games also rose to popularity, and would pave the way for the likes of *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Numerous long-standing RPG series that continue to be popular today have their origins in the mid-Nineties console craze, including *Star Ocean*, *Valkyrie Profile* and *Suikoden*. The ongoing *Megami Tensei* series, which saw its first game in 1987 and its latest on the 3DS earlier this year, also had a number of its landmark titles released in the Nineties. *Megami Tensei*'s success in the West pales in comparison to its Japanese popularity, where it is overshadowed only by *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*.

RPGs were now branching out both in terms of gameplay and their fictional settings, spreading beyond being strictly high fantasy or straight up sci-fi affairs. RPG elements had found their way into titles that otherwise had nothing to do with the genre, such as platforming classic *Wonderboy In Monsterland* and arcade beat-'em-ups that included Capcom's official *Dungeons & Dragons* titles. Even the *Castlevania* games from *Symphony Of The Night* onwards can be considered RPGs to some extent, as they tick a fair amount of the right boxes: experience points, a levelling system, stats affected by equipment, a manageable inventory and some degree of character customisation. It may look like a platformer, but you're not fooling us Konami.

Adventure games too have seen their share of their RPG injection, with probably the most notable series being *Quest For Glory* (originally *Hero's Quest*) from Sierra. You could play as a fighter, magic-user or thief, and there were multiple solutions to puzzles depending on skills and character class. There was no levelling system, but rather skills improved with practice and, like many RPGs of the time, *QFG* continued

THE INTERVIEW

Josh Sawyer (Icewind Dale, Neverwinter Nights 2, Fallout: New Vegas, Project Eternity) on creating RPG magic



Can you remember the first RPG you played from start to finish?
The Bard's Tale was my first RPG (on the C64), but I never finished it. The first RPG I actually completed was *Bard's Tale II*. I would have been about 11 when it came out. It was a long, hard game. The Snares Of Death were especially difficult, and I had to trade notes with some friends to get through them all.

What were some early RPGs that got you hooked, and which influenced your own game design?
The Bard's Tale, *Wizardry*, *Ultima*, and *Phantasie* series were all big ones. I also played *Basic* and *Expert D&D* before transitioning to *AD&D* (First Edition). *The Magic Candle* was also pretty influential because it was so different from the other fantasy RPGs I played. In the late Eighties and early Nineties I played all of the SSI Gold Box *AD&D* games and other tabletop RPGs like *Call Of Cthulhu*, WEG's *Star Wars* and *Paranoia*. That's also when I got hooked on one of my favorite CRPGs, *Darklands*. In the late Nineties I was in college, where I played a lot of tabletop games and, most notably, the first *Fallout*. Of those games, the original *Pool Of Radiance*, *Darklands*, and *Fallout* had the most impact on me. They allow the player a lot of freedom to define their characters and to make their way through the world as they choose.

So, what makes a good RPG?
Personally, I value the ability to define a character's personality, express that personality meaningfully (ie with consequence) in the world, and change elements of the story based on the choices I make. These are the things I think are important for an RPG, specifically. But whatever type of game you're making, the mechanics should be enjoyable. If you're going to have combat, make the combat interesting and enjoyable. If you're going to have a skill tree, it should create difficult decisions for the player.

Why do think certain RPGs maintain such a strong following so long after their release?
RPGs often succeed at creating worlds and characters that people want to revisit. The same holds true in books, films, and other media. Even if the mechanics of a game have become easy for veteran players, the fans want to go back for more.

Tell us one thing we don't yet know about *Project: Eternity*…
One of our companions has feathers (or 'fethers' for UO players).



» [PC] *The Elder Scrolls* series remains immensely popular.



» [PC] Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft* took the genre in exciting new directions.

the tradition of importing your character into later sequels, allowing an epic adventure if a character were taken through the entire series. The first title, *So You Want To Be A Hero*, is now almost 25 years old and remains one of the most fondly remembered adventure games of all time. Both the 16 colour EGA original and its mouse-driven, 256 colour VGA remake still play brilliantly today, and AGD Interactive has produced an excellent remake of the second game, *Trial By Fire*, which is free to download.

While Japanese RPGs found their groove early on and continued down much the same successful path since their Eighties roots and subsequent Nineties heyday, the Western RPG has seen a more tumultuous journey while it locked on to its own identity. Japanese RPGs all but dominated the console line-up, and the once thriving computer RPG scene waned as Amigas and Ataris were retired and home gaming choices basically became a split between PC or console. Rather than mimic what was being done on the PlayStation, a number of strong PC and Mac outings in the late Nineties defined what Western RPGs were, with a darker, often more mature setting than the bright colours and youthful protagonists so ubiquitous in the Japanese offerings. Blizzard's *Diablo* became the benchmark for action-RPGs, Interplay's *Fallout* would reignite an interest in the post-nuclear setting, the *Baldur's Gate* series set the gold standard for *Dungeons & Dragons* on home systems and *Planescape: Torment* would take RPG writing to entirely new levels. While console RPGs forged ahead with little variation on their winning formula, computer RPGs had truly undergone a renaissance that has since seen new but characteristically Western series reaching bestseller status. Series such as *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, *The Witcher*, *Mass Effect* and the later *Elder Scrolls* games are all characteristically Western and all classics in their own right.

The back catalogues of both Japanese and Western RPGs encompass thousands of hours of playing time, and this extends to the near infinite if we start including *World Of Warcraft*, *Final Fantasy Online*, and the slew of other MMORPGs just waiting to suck gamers' lives away. And if you've somehow managed to play them all, well, the resurgence of indie gaming and the popularity of Kickstarter projects that recall the classics means that the RPG in all its forms has cemented itself as a genre that not only has decades behind it, but doubtless has decades more still to come.

RPG Legends

We reveal some of the best RPG adventurers from four decades of gaming. If you're heading out on a dangerous quest then these are the heroes you should add to your party

CLOUD STRIFE

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Final Fantasy VII
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Unruly blonde hair, a purple outfit and cubes for hands
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Buster Sword



■ A former SOLDIER turned mercenary, Cloud sides up with AVALANCHE against the evil Shinra Electric Power Company, who decided not to print their entire name all in upper-case. At first brash and apparently selfish, as *FFVII* moves on Cloud proves himself a deep and emotionally rich character, and remains a fan favourite almost two decades after he first graced our TVs.

LEGEND LEVEL

TORNEKO TALOON

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Dragon Warrior IV
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Paunch belly, purpley hair
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Price negotiation



■ The pudgy, purple-haired merchant from *Chapters Of The Chosen* is far from your standard, feisty teenage JRPG hero, but his great design and unusual take on being a hero saw him prove so popular that he cameo'd in *Dragon Quest VIII* and *IX*, and starred in his own roguelike spin-off game that unfortunately never made it out of Japan.

LEGEND LEVEL

RYU

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Breath Of Fire
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Blue hair, occasionally quite dragon-ish
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Price negotiation



■ Part child, part dragon, this blue-haired protagonist is also one of the most accomplished fishermen in RPG history. Part of an ancient dragon clan, Ryu gains the ability to transform into one of the mythical beasts as he continues the ancient battle between good and evil along with his friend and part-time love interest, the winged and magical young Nina.

LEGEND LEVEL

MORTE

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Planescape: Torment
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: He is a floating, talking skull
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Teeth



■ A wise-cracking, dirty-minded fellow who has a full inventory despite being literally just a floating skull. Morte is one of the most memorable side-kicks in Western RPGs, and admittedly, although he's a bit of a legend, he's far from what we'd consider a hero. Very well written and backed up by excellent voice acting, Morte is a prime example of how to craft an unforgettable character.

LEGEND LEVEL

KREIA

SEX: Female
FIRST APPEARANCE: Knights Of The Old Republic II
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Blind, covers most of her face with a hood
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Lightsaber, The Force



■ A blind yet highly skilled Jedi Master, she is so strong with the force that she is able to see without natural eyesight. She was master to Revan, and her interest in the history of the Sith and disagreements with the council set her off on a dangerous path towards the dark side. Kreia embodies character depth and mystery, and holds a fair amount of secrets for players to discover.

LEGEND LEVEL

MINSC

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Baldur's Gate
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Bald head, purple markings, hamster side-kick
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Two-handed sword



■ Minsc is a powerful Rashemen ranger, loyal to the last in his quest to protect compatriot magic-user Dynaheir. He's a popular *Forgotten Realms* character, appearing in all the *Baldur's Gate* games and one of the few who is playable throughout the series. Another of Minsc's most stand-out features is his relationship with Boo, which he is convinced is a Miniature Giant Space Hamster. Sure, why not?

LEGEND LEVEL

IOLO

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Ultima I
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Facial hair
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Crossbow



■ A stalwart of the *Ultima* series, Iolo, like Lord British and the Avatar was born on Earth before he ventured to Sosaria. The loyal and friendly bard has travelled with the Avatar (or, the Stranger if you prefer) lending his considerable skills with both a lute and a crossbow, and along with the likes of Shamino and Dupre is a valued and steadfast member of the Companions of the Avatar.

LEGEND LEVEL

COMMANDER SHEPARD

SEX: Male or female
FIRST APPEARANCE: Mass Effect
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Model good looks
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Pistol, assault rifle or omni-tool.



■ A soldier and starship commander who has attained the highest level of military training, Shepard is not only the face of humanity in the galaxy, but also its final hope against the Reapers. Playable as either a male or female and just as well produced and voiced for both, the active and vocal Shepard is the antithesis of the traditional silent protagonist.

LEGEND LEVEL

ALYS BRANGWIN

SEX: Female
FIRST APPEARANCE: Phantasy Star IV: End Of The Millennium
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Brown hair, red & white clothing
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Slicer



■ An about-turn in the tradition of having an old man mentor a la Obi-Wan Kenobi, the young and vibrant Alys is the most renowned member of the Hunter's Guild and serves as guide and teacher to *PSIV*'s protagonist, Chaz. Highly skilled with a slicer and able to command fire magic, Alys plays a crucial role in Chaz's quest.

LEGEND LEVEL

FROG

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Chrono Trigger
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: An overwhelming frogness to him
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Masumane sword



■ Born a human named Glenn, Frog is one of the most iconic and popular characters in JRPG history. Gallant and loyal, this powerful and skilled swordsman (swordsfrog?) seeks to avenge the death of a close friend by defeating the evil sorcerer Magus. He also wields water magic and can unleash some devastating combo attacks when teaming up with his party members.

LEGEND LEVEL

RUDY ROUGHKNIGHT

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Wild Arms
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Bright blue hair, red headband and a white plaster permanently on his cheek
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Hand cannon



■ Rudy Roughknight is the protagonist and one of three key characters in the *Wild Arms* series. With the ability to wield the titular Ancient Relic Machines, the former orphan becomes a veritable force as he traverses the Wild West-inspired wastelands of Filgaia with his posse of friends in tow.

LEGEND LEVEL

HK-47

SEX: Masculine programming
FIRST APPEARANCE: Knights Of The Old Republic
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: That metallic shine
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Blaster rifle



■ A Hunter-Killer droid constructed by Revan with the express intention of serving as his personal assassin, this 'meatbag'-hating artificial intelligence is packed with more personality than many living companions we've journeyed with over the years. The closest thing to being inorganic 'evil', HK-47 was great to have along to add a bit of spice if you were opting for an otherwise goody-two shoes Jedi adventure.

LEGEND LEVEL

VIVI ORNITIER

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Final Fantasy IX
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Large hat, blue clothes, glowing yellow eyes
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Staff, magic



■ Vivi is one of those brilliantly crafted characters whose visual design is as outstanding as his personality. The at first stumbling and shy black mage undergoes a great journey of personal development over the course of his adventure. Deep, conflicted and emotionally engaging, Vivi stands out as one of the best examples of RPG character development we've ever seen.

LEGEND LEVEL

ISAAC

SEX: Male
FIRST APPEARANCE: Golden Sun
DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Yellow cape, same barber as Cloud Strife
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Venus magic



■ Isaac is the young, Djinn collecting, earth magic playable-character tasked with preventing the return of the forces of Alchemy to the world of Weynard. Like Link, Isaac is the opposite of the Shepard school of protagonists, being almost entirely mute for the duration of the series – an alternative for players looking to project themselves into what they imagine the hero's personality to be.

LEGEND LEVEL

Minority Report



Many people see the Atari 7800 as the downtrodden rival of the Nintendo Entertainment System and the Sega Master System. Kieren Hawken wants to set the record straight by uncovering some real gems for the console



» [Atari 7800] In case you were wondering, the Japanese text says "what were we smoking?"

NINJA GOLF

■ DEVELOPER: BLUE SKY SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1990

■ Every system has that iconic game that has become synonymous with it, whether it be *Sonic The Hedgehog* on the Mega Drive, *Jet Set Willy* on the Spectrum, *Super Mario Bros* on the NES or *Halo* on the Xbox. Well, that title for the Atari 7800 is *Ninja Golf*, a game so amazingly stupid sounding that you would think there was no way it could ever be good. But in fact it is, not just good in fact but, dare we say it, a game worth owning an Atari 7800 for. It was programmed by Blue Sky Software, a company that has become more famous for titles like *Joe Montana Football*, *Jurassic Park* and *Dick Tracy* on the Sega Mega Drive. If we ignore the golf part of the title for the moment, the game plays quite a lot like Sega's classic, *Shinobi*. You run through each section duffing up the bad guys and collecting the handy shurikens. At the end of each level you face a boss in the form of a dragon who you lob said shurikens at from a third-person perspective. This part of the game is very reminiscent of *Shinobi*'s bonus stages.

Now for the golf part… Before you can fight anybody you must take your shot, and where you go from there depends on where the ball lands. If it lands in the rough you face hidden ninjas, in the sand trap you fight snakes and if it drops in the water you must battle bloodthirsty sharks. This is not only an incredibly original feature but also adds lots of variation to the proceedings. Once you have fought



» CROSSBOW

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **When Exidy released** the coin-op version of *Crossbow* in 1983 it was a groundbreaking achievement. Not only did it feature a huge replica of a crossbow on the cabinet but it was also the very first arcade game to use fully digitised sound and speech. While the Atari 7800 version of the game doesn't recreate any of that, it does provide a very good conversion of the rest of the game that is fully compatible with the Atari XG-1 lightgun. The idea of the game is to help a growing team of explorers across a land full of evil by shooting everything that tries to attack them – not as easy as it might sound.



» TANK COMMAND

■ DEVELOPER: FROGGO ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **While Froggo's Atari** 2600 library was full of terrible knock-offs and re-releases of other people's games, its titles for the 7800 were all rather spiffing original games. *Tank Command* is somewhat similar to games like *Commando* and *Ikari Warriors* except you are controlling a heavily armoured tank as opposed to a vulnerable human being. All you have to do is drive it through the battlefield taking out the enemy tanks and bunkers while trying not to kill the hostages. You must also remember to pick up the fuel to keep your tank rolling. *Tank Command* can be tough, but it can also be a lot of fun too.

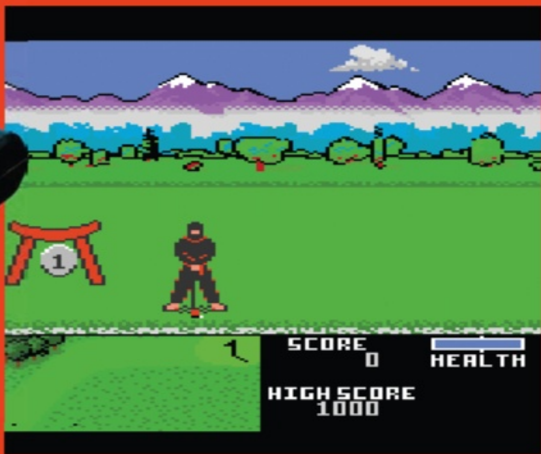


» DARK CHAMBERS

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **While the 7800** never did get an official port of *Gauntlet*, despite one being announced, it did get the next best thing in *Dark Chambers*. This title is actually based on the computer game *Dandy*, which was in fact the inspiration behind the famous Atari coin-op. It plays in an extremely similar way, with you fighting your way through a series of maze-like dungeons collecting the treasure and trying to stay alive. Like *Gauntlet*, this game also allows you to team up with another player in your quest through the chambers. Make sure you ramp up the difficulty though, as it's a bit of chore on the easiest setting.





» [Atari 7800] Do you remember this from your ninja training? Neither do we!



» [Atari 7800] The recent changes to the PGA Tour have proved quite exciting.

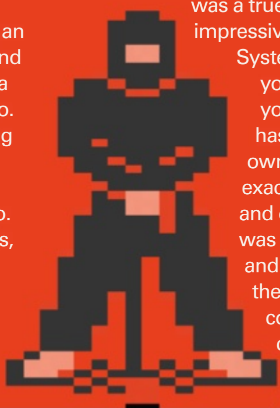


» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The Atari 7800 ProSystem was originally released in 1984 to a small test market but legal wranglings and the sale of Atari saw its full release delayed until 1986.
- Originally there was no European release planned, but Atari changed its mind in 1987 due to the newfound popularity of games consoles.

your way through a section it's time to take another swing at the ball until you reach the putting green to face off against the fire-breathing dragon we mentioned earlier. There are nine holes in total, which get progressively harder as they go on.

Ninja Golf is not just an amazingly innovative and original game but also a very impressive one too. Blue Sky did an amazing job with the graphics and the limited sound capacity of the 7800 too. The well-defined sprites, detailed backgrounds and parallax scrolling put this a notch above pretty much every other game on the console. The music and sound effects are not nearly as harsh on the ears as many other 7800 games – a real disadvantage of the machine is the use of the 2600 sound chip. It is games like this that show that the 7800 really was a true rival to the often more impressive NES and Sega Master System. From the moment you start playing *Ninja Golf* you realise why this game has such a cult status among owners of the console. This is exactly the kind of quirky, fun and outlandish game that Atari was known for in its early years and showed that, even under the reign of the Tramiels, Atari could still be the innovative company it had been previously known as.



» [Atari 7800] *Puff The Magic Dragon* isn't just a nursery rhyme after all!

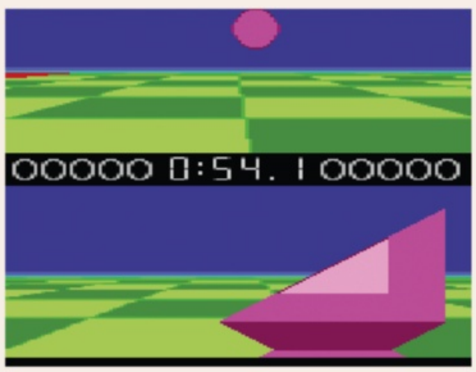




» CRACK'ED

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **When it comes** to original games on the 7800 they probably don't get more unique than this one. The idea of the strangely named *Crack'ed* is quite simple, to protect a series of nests full of eggs from various creatures that are trying to steal them. You do this by moving a crosshair around the screen to shoot them as they approach. If they manage to steal an egg then you can still shoot them before they leave the screen and then catch the egg and return it to a nest. Each level takes place in a new surrounding, from a farm to the depths of the sea. There are also some fun bonus levels to take part in too. Overall, well worth seeking it.



» BALLBLAZER

■ DEVELOPER: LUCASFILM ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **One of the** first games to be released by the now sadly defunct Lucasfilm Games (later known as LucasArts), *Ballblazer* is a game that really shows what the Atari 7800 is capable of when put in the right hands. *Ballblazer* is a futuristic sports game where the idea is to race a ship around a grid trying to knock a giant ball into the opponent's goal, it was also one of the first titles to feature a split screen two-player mode. The 3D engine is incredibly fast and smooth, but equally impressive is the superb music thanks to the cartridge's on-board POKEY chip – one of the few Atari 7800 games to have one.



» WATER SKI

■ DEVELOPER: FROGGO ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Water skiing might** not seem like a very obvious sport to turn into a videogame, but Froggo obviously saw a gap in the market back in 1988. In this title you have to control both the boat and the man holding on for dear life behind it as you make your way up a hazardous river. In two-player mode you can split each of these duties between you. Holding a button down controls the skier and letting go controls the boat, making the controls pretty easy. As well as avoiding the various hazards, you can launch yourself off the ramps to gain some serious bonus points. A tough but rewarding title for the 7800.

Minority Report

DESERT FALCON

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1987



» [Atari 7800] Do you sphinx you're hard enough to take him out?

■ **Sega's *Zaxxon* set the arcades on fire when it was released, but the home versions of the game were less impressive.**

The 3D-style isometric perspective proved difficult for many machines to replicate properly. So some of the ports avoided it completely, going for a behind the ship third-person view (2600, Intellivision and Master System) while others features sub-standard graphics or jerky scrolling (MSX, Spectrum and Dragon 32). When Atari first showed off *Desert Falcon* (then called *Nile Flier*) for its Atari 7800 ProSystem in 1987, people were very impressed indeed. A *Zaxxon* clone set in ancient Egypt; it nailed the isometric graphics perfectly while adding a host of new features. The biggest of these is the unique power-up system that revolves around collecting hieroglyphics that are littered around the desert below. Collecting these in different sets and variations will result in different effects to your falcon. You bird has to land and then walk along the ground (another new feature) in order to pick these up which is made difficult by the sand bugs that try to stop you. As you dodge past the pyramids and obelisks enemies fly towards you relentlessly. You can either shoot them down or make them crash into the scenery themselves. At the end of each level you have to face off against a huge sphinx in order to progress. With its impressive graphics, original gameplay features and suitably Egyptian sound, *Desert Falcon* remains one of the most technically impressive games for Atari's 8-bit console and a great game to boot.

» KLAX

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1992

■ *Klax* holds the accolade of being the arcade game with the most official home ports! The 7800 version is one of the best 8-bit iterations out there.



» COMMANDO

■ DEVELOPER: SCULPTURED SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1989

■ While this shooter is a very famous game indeed, we thought it worthy of a mention given that it is arguably far superior to the rival version found on the NES.





» XENOPHOBE

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **While not being** the most obscure game out there, the Bally/Midway coin-op *Xenophobe* never achieved the recognition that we feel it rightly deserved. Thankfully Atari licensed this game, which is heavily based on the classic movie *Aliens*, for release on all its home formats and a jolly good job it did of it too. The 7800 version might not be as impressive as the slick Lynx iteration but it certainly has the edge over the rival NES version. One or two players must rid the space stations of the xeno infestations and recover the valuable resources. Great graphics and split-screen gameplay make this a must have title for the 7800.



» SCRAPYARD DOG

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **There is no** denying that one of the key reasons why Nintendo won the 8-bit console war in the US was the release of *Super Mario Bros*. So, it is only logical that Atari would try to come up with a similar mascot of its own, just as Sega did with Alex Kidd and, later, Sonic The Hedgehog. Well, that game is *Scrapyard Dog*, a title it also released for the Lynx handheld. If you ignore the corny story about saving a dog and the strange looking big-nosed character, there is actually a very good platformer in here. The *Super Mario Bros* influences are clear to see, with its precise jumping, power-ups and secret areas to discover.



» MIDNIGHT MUTANTS

■ DEVELOPER: RADIOACTIVE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **While the name** of this game might not be instantly recognisable, the licence that it has probably will be. *Midnight Mutants* is a huge isometric arcade adventure that features none other than Grandpa Munster, aka actor Al Lewis. He guides you on your quest to rescue him from Dr Evil, a villain who is trying to take revenge for being burned at the stake as a witch by one of your ancestors on Halloween night in 1747. *Midnight Mutants* was one of the last commercial games to be released for the 7800 and it shows, as it's easily one of the most advanced games to be found on the machine.



ALIEN BRIGADE

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Back in the late Eighties light games became all the rage, mostly brought on by the success of the arcade game *Operation Wolf*.**

Atari wanted a slice of this pie, so as well as releasing the XG-1 lightgun for the 7800 it produced its very own clone of Taito's hit game to go with it. At first look *Alien Brigade* is incredibly similar to *Operation Wolf,* but it does actually have a few key features of its own. The story of the game revolves around aliens taking over the earth and disguising themselves as humans. Some of the enemies are actual extra-terrestrials, while others appear in humanoid form.



The key to the game is spotting the difference between the real people and the aliens. This is done in two ways; either wait for them to change and shoot them before they shoot you or look how fast they move – the aliens move much slower than the humans. The enemy also has tanks, helicopters and armoured vehicles at their disposal too so you will need to use your ammo wisely, conserve you grenades and grab the weapon upgrades when you see them. This game can be played with either a standard controller or a lightgun, but is much more fun with the latter. It is, without question, one of the best games released for the ProSystem.



» [Atari 7800] If only you could have shot the alien in *ET* on the 2600 too!

» FOOD FIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1984

■ A terrific conversion of the Atari coin-op arcade game, *Food Fight* is the most fun you can have with comestibles without having to clear up the mess afterwards.



» JINKS

■ DEVELOPER: SOFTGOLD ■ YEAR: 1989

■ Programmed by the German company that would eventually become Rainbow Arts, *Jinks* is a wacky mix of *Breakout* and pinball that works very well indeed.





» MELTDOWN

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1990

■ ***Meltdown* is one** of a few lightgun-only games for the Atari 7800. It might not look like much but, in fact, this is a highly challenging and addictive release. The object of *Meltdown* is to protect your nuclear reactor in the middle of the screen from attack. You do this by shooting the particles that are bouncing around the screen trying to break down the core. As the levels increase the enemies multiply and it gets increasingly frantic. Thankfully there are also various power-ups you can grab too with rapid fire being an absolute godsend. Another useful feature is the password system that allows you to return to where you left off.



» FATAL RUN

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Unlike the Lynx,** the 7800 never did get an official conversion of Atari's *RoadBlasters*. But in *Fatal Run* it did get the next best thing, as many of the elements of this game are exactly the same. The game is set in a *Mad Max*-like post-apocalyptic world where you drive from city to city blasting other cars off the road and earning money to upgrade your vehicle at the next stop. This game provides a great sensation of speed and also offers up some great weaponry to take out the other road users too. By far the most impressive parts of this game, however, are the entertaining cut-scenes when you reach each town.



» BASKETBRAWL

■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Another one of** those games that appeared on the Lynx and 7800 almost simultaneously, *Basketbrawl* is a highly violent take on the popular sport of street hoops. A game for one or two players, you get to choose from a bunch of mean-looking thugs to make up your team and then hit the courts. Like the popular *NBA Jam*, *Basketbrawl* is a two-on-two game where you can collect power-ups to gain some serious advantage. But unlike the Midway title, in this game you can also get tooled up to take out the opposition! Both fun and very violent, this is easily one of the best sports titles for the vintage Atari.

Gribbly's Day Out

A charming tale of a bouncing alien babysitter from the planet Blabgor, Gribbly's Day Out was the breakthrough title for a rising young programmer who'd become a hero of the Commodore 64. Mike Bevan talks to Andrew Braybrook about his first original game



IN THE KNOW

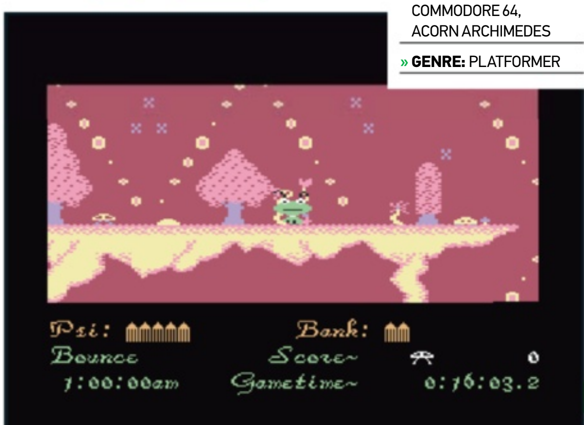
» **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS

» **DEVELOPER:** GRAFTGOLD

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, ACORN ARCHIMEDES

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



» [C64] Another peaceful day on Planet Blabgor.

G*ribbly's Day Out* isn't your average game. Starring a one-footed, no-armed, hopping, flying beastie – the eponymous Gribbly – it's a rescue mission involving extra-terrestrial toddlers and an ever-evolving alien ecosystem. With his frog-like features and peculiar method of locomotion, as he bounced and floated across the cavernous levels in search of baby gribletts, C64 gamers soon took the unusual hero to their hearts. The game was developed by Graftgold, a small programming outfit that consisted of two developers, Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook. Before its release, Steve had been the most well-known of the pair, with games like 3D *Seiddab Attack*, 3D *Lunattack*, and the gothic fantasy adventure *Avalon* under his belt.

Andrew had been busy porting Steve's *Seiddab* shoot-'em-up to the Dragon 32 before being assigned to convert *Lunattack* to the Commodore 64, a machine he'd soon completely fall for. "I wrote *Lunattack* first on the C64 as I had already coded the game for the Dragon," he tells us. "However, that game design used the screen in bitmap [high-res] mode, which was quite unusual for the C64, though it did let me get into using hardware sprites for the first time!"

After C64 *Lunattack* was done, Andrew was keen to make his own mark on the machine. "I was ready to do my own game designs," he confesses. "Steve had been writing his *Avalon* series on the Spectrum, but I don't remember there ever being a discussion about converting those to the C64. They were also bitmap games rather than character-based, not playing to the C64's strengths. I wanted to use more of the C64's hardware features.

"That included hardware collision detection between sprites and against the background. I think it was the only time I used them as they came with rules and restrictions and didn't, on their own, give you enough information to deal with situations. For simpler games such collisions would be expected to result in the destruction of one sprite object at least, but that wasn't



» [C64] Gribbly inspects a crawling Topsie.



» [C64] Bringing gribblets back to his home cave makes Gribbly happy.

quite what *Gribbly's Day* Out called for…"

Being able to switch between bounding along solid ground – during which Gribbly could pass through most background scenery unscathed – and the hazardous but more mobile flying mechanic was a unique approach. "Gribbly and bouncing along were part of the original plan," says Andrew. "I was keen to try something unconventional. The flying mode included an element of gravity, and the transitions made for some interesting code. I started off with a character scrolling routine using multi-colour mode, and was easily achieving 25 frames-per-second. The scrolling would have run at 50 frames-per-second – the arcade game requirement – but there wasn't enough time left to run all the objects in the game that I wanted."

The project was Andrew's first attempt at creating and animating his own game character, along with its bizarre cast of gribblet-threatening adversaries. But the restrictions of using multi-coloured sprites on the Commodore 64 led to a certain amount of compromise. "There's no sprite or character reflection in hardware, something that many arcade machines did have, so objects moving left or right had to be separately drawn," he says. "You might notice that the different forms of the meanies are all bi-directional.

"For Gribbly, I wanted to get some facial expressions, and by writing the mouth, eye ▶

"Gribbly and bouncing along were part of the original plan. I was keen to try something unconventional"

Andrew Braybrook

MORE FANTASTIC DEBUTS

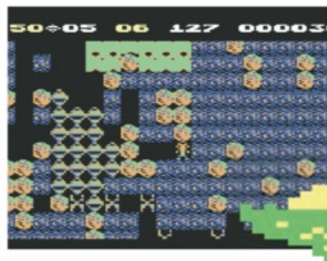
Five other first-timers that excelled

RAID ON BUNGELING BAY
1984



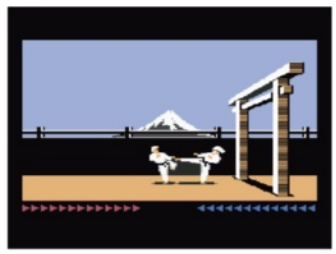
■ This shoot-'em-up was the debut of Will Wright, later responsible for the *SimCity* franchise. It's unusual in emulating a miniature transport network, with boats scuttling across waterways and factories supplying an evil war machine intent on building a nasty battleship – something it's up to you to put a stop to.

BOULDER DASH 1984



■ That two previously unknown designers could come up with a game so sublimely perfect was remarkable, but the fact that *Boulder Dash* is as enjoyable today as it was in 1984 makes it doubly so. With the boulder-avoiding, diamond-grabbing antics of Rockford, pattern-based enemies and some ingeniously puzzling levels, it's a title we still return to.

KARATEKA 1984



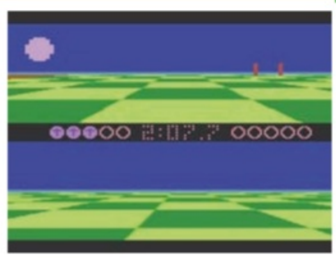
■ Before *Prince Of Persia*, Jordan Mechner created a similarly cinematic tale of distressed damsels with this beat-'em-up. Despite its repetitiveness, being effectively a series of one-on-one kung-fu encounters, *Karateka* turned heads with its lifelike animation and movie-like presentation, and went on to sell over half a million copies – quite a feat for a debut.

JETPAC 1983



■ The game that launched the iconic Jetman and legendary British software house Ultimate Play The Game. Build your rocket ship piece by piece, fuel it up and blast off to the next level, all while keeping nasties at bay with your *Defender*-like laser-blaster. One of the first arcade-like experiences on the Spectrum, it's a simple but addictive concept that's executed to perfection.

BALLBLAZER 1984



■ This stunning 3D futuristic sports game was the first release from Lucasfilm Games. It's a fast and frantic cross between basketball and football and sees you racing backwards and forwards across an impressively scrolling playing field trying to score as many points as possible. A highly accomplished debut that remains insanely addictive today.



» [C64] The purple switches deactivate parts of the web – just don't release Seon…

GRIBBLY'S THIRD DAY OUT?

Our unusual protagonist's lost chapter

■ While Andrew later updated two of his famous C64 titles for the Amiga in the form of *Paradroid '90* and *Uridium 2*, he never made a version of *Gribbly's Day Out* for the machine. Or did he? "*Fire & Ice* on the Amiga started out as a new version of *Gribbly's*, with bouncing and all," he reveals to **RG**. "Renegade weren't so sure about it so *Cool Coyote* was born. There's a bonus level of *Fire & Ice* which features the *Gribbly* ecosystem, including gribblets. You can't die on that level, you just have to collect as many bonuses as possible." So, at least in spirit, Gribbly did make it to the Amiga after all…



▶ and antenna graphics into the sprite data directly that gave more frames for the meanies. By the time I'd done the antennae, eyes and the mouth there wasn't much space left in the sprite. There wasn't any need for a body though, or arms, or even two feet if he was to bounce. From early on I wanted him to look alive, even in pause mode. I got caught out because the movement of the antennae and [him] blinking meant we couldn't get a good slow photo. So I added 'cheese mode', where he faced the front and smiled for the photo…"

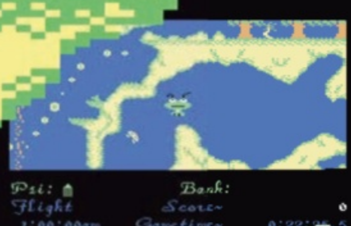
Given the constraints of the 64's graphic modes, it was remarkable how Andrew managed to breathe such life and personality into his bubble-blowing, bug-eyed hero. This was something he also achieved, if to a lesser extent, with the game's miniature rescuees. "I knew what I wanted from the gribblets," he declares. "We used animated characters with a simple physics equation to figure out the acceleration to get them to jump up or down levels. Each gribblet looked for a nearby piece of flat grass to jump to. If it saw a place to land, it marked it by swapping the grass graphic with identical-looking but different characters, which blocked any other gribblet from going there. Then the gribblet was replaced by a sprite that showed it spinning across to the target in an arc. When I first got that working with some background graphics it was fascinating just to watch the screen come to life. The meanies had a life-cycle that interacted with the gribblets… that came in next."

Which touches on one of the game's most interesting features – how the other inhabitants of Blabgor evolved from simple life forms into ever more dangerous creatures, in real-time. Each of the 16 levels was a self-contained little world, where floating seeds spawned into worm-like topsies which bumbled around, doing little more than turning gribblets upside down, before entering a pupal stage. Left alone, these would hatch into the ultimate gribblett menaces – stompers and flyers.

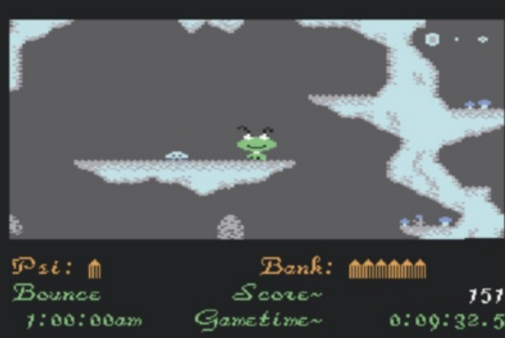
"The ecosystem was fundamental," Andrew agrees. "I started off with the sycamore seeds. I had picked some up one day and was fascinated that nature could devise a flying wing to get the seeds further from the tree. The motion also meant that I could get a wider object than a single sprite as the animation is asymmetrical. The worm stage was an experiment in a new movement method again, and then the chrysalis stage makes them vulnerable and motionless for a while before a much nastier stage emerges. It's about giving the player multiple things to think about, so they can prioritise risks."

The nastier creatures are a real threat to the scattered gribblets, so it paid to bubble and kill the emerging hostiles in the more benign stages of their lifecycle. Leave it too late and stompers would kidnap gribblets and take to the sky as flyers, leaving Gribbly no choice but to chase and bubble them down and catch the falling gribblets before they hit terra firma. "I was always influenced by the arcade machines," says Andrew. "They represented the end goal, plenty of colour and sprites and multiple playfields… fantastic! I'm sure there is some influence from *Defender* in there, from a point of view of rescuing captured gribblets. Although you can't shoot them… that would have been too mean."

The game's most notorious enemy, the crab-like Seon, is more reminiscent of the terrifying namesake baddie from *Sinistar.* Most of the time he's harmlessly trapped in the web-like mesh that crosses the scrolling levels, but in a particularly heart-pounding design decision by Andrew, near the end of each level he'll come chasing after you. "Seon serves the purpose of hurrying you up," he reasons, "as he gets freed by the web powering off when the last gribblet remains. We wanted a way to turn up the heat to make a final dash for home. It also changed the focus for the player. Some



» [C64] A tricky bit of tunnel navigation to reach a missing gribblet.

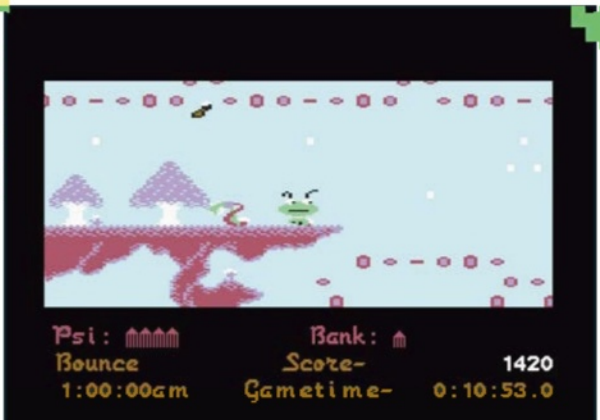


» [C64] Awwwww. Look at how cute he looks.

players used to put the seventh gribblet close to home, but not in it, then go get the eighth one so that the last two went in rapid succession. That could work, as long as the gribblet didn't wander off. The web coming down and indeed Seon himself did get added later on just to speed things up. Seon never gets killed, you have to bubble him, and he gets afraid for a while before coming back.

"The web was in there quite early for two distinct purposes. Firstly, it made sure there were always graphics on the screen so you could see the scrolling even when there was no land visible, and secondly it made flying more focused. I designed the levels so that there were pathways through the air to lead you to the interesting bits. If you wanted to explore though you could, and you might have to in order to track a Flyer, so it was a punishment for allowing a gribblet to be captured."

> **"The meanies had a life-cycle that interacted with the gribblets. The ecosystem was fundamental"**
> Andrew Braybrook



» [C64] *Gribbly's Special Day Out*, with its updated font and all-new levels.


» [Archimedes] The rare Archimedes conversion of *Gribbly's Day Out*.


» [Archimedes] Gribbly does seem to have eaten a few pies in this version though.

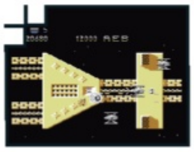
Given the demands of retrieving wayward gribblets and the life-sapping nature of the Blabgorian terrain, *Gribbly's* was an exceptionally tough game. The fact that Andrew programmed realistic inertia into *Gribbly's* flying made navigating some of the narrow cave-like corridors particularly tricky. "I played some of the tighter flying manoeuvres over and over," he admits. "The game featured an energy bar, so a bad contact with the scenery wasn't necessarily fatal. Using sprite to background collision just tells you that an overlap has occurred, so I then had to generate a reverse movement so that the collision was cleared. With gravity pulling down that was quite difficult, and occasionally Gribbly was dragged into a collision. The use of acceleration was not widely used in the early days, but I think that it does give games a better feel."

"The control mode of any game is vital," adds Andrew. "We were coding for a standard one-button joystick, so you had to be clever with using button held-down and combined moves. The gravity and speeds were all tuneable values, and we would spend a lot of time getting those how we wanted, and they are constant throughout the game. We always play-tested and made comments on each other's games as we went along. Steve did the music and sound in the game, and would have been trying out some of the levels. He was doubtless busy on his own game so we tended to work independently to try to surprise each other."

Luckily the controls of the finished product were tuned to perfection, resulting in a game that felt wonderful to play. The originality and scope of *Gribbly's* struck a chord with players and reviewers, with monthly C64 tome *Zzap!* handing it a 90 pre cent overall score and a well-deserved Sizzler award. "Of course I was thrilled to bits to get recognition for the efforts; validation, if you like," says Andrew. "I went over to *Zzap!* Towers and got to meet Julian Rignall, Gary Penn, Gary Liddon, and Chris Anderson. The *Paradroid Diaries* we did came out of that meeting and off the back of that review. I still have all the *Zzap!* magazines in folders."

"After the original I did 16 new levels and a bit of tidying up, and we put out a second one called *Gribbly's Special Day Out*. I think that all the tunings remained, as I wanted the feel to be the same. The 'glitch' at the crossover point [in the original game] is especially embarrassing as it's quite easy to get rid of, as I know now. *Gribbly's Special Day Out* resolved that, as did *Paradroid*. There was also a project to do an Archimedes version that looked really nice from the pictures. I never got to see it in the flesh but I saw some screenshots… that's a rarity now."

Gribbly's Day Out would be the first of many original and well-regarded C64 titles for Andrew. As Commodore veterans will know, he went on to create some of the system's finest, most technically impressive titles, including *Paradroid*, *Uridium*, *Alleykat* and *Morpheus*. But he still harbours a soft spot for the bouncing Blabgorian from his first true solo effort. "I've still got a *Gribbly's* promo mug in my cupboard from back in the day," he tells us. "Although my cassette box for the game has no cassette in it! I think I kept a listing of the program too, somewhere, and I guess we have the source code on a C64 floppy disk. What are the odds of that still loading up?"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

AVALON
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

PARADROID
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1985

URIDIUM (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1986



» [C64] Get away from them you… crab!



In the chair with…



NIGEL ALDERTON

30 years ago, at the age of 17, Nigel Alderton created one of the most egg-cellent games to grace the ZX Spectrum. Five years later he seemingly disappeared from the games industry. Graeme Mason promises no more terrible puns and chats to the man behind the iconic platformer, Chuckie Egg…

As **Retro Gamer** arrives at the quiet cul-de-sac nestling in the shadow of Stockport County FC's ground, aircraft to and from the nearby Manchester airport punctuate the eerie silence. Behind one of these doors resides a Spectrum legend and enigma; a famous platformer and a brace of arcade conversions is the apparent story of Nigel Alderton. We're here to find out more on the man and, of course, the games.

Upon entry to the quaint, almost stereotypical Northern terraced house, we're greeted by a smiling Nigel who cheerily welcomes us into his home. "Must be convenient for home matches," we comment smugly. "They're not doing too well these days," remarks Nigel, who supports his hometown team, Newcastle. "Still," he continues, "at least match days are pretty quiet…" "Every cloud and all that," we chime, before digging out our trusty tape recorder…



» [Spectrum] Level One of *Chuckie Egg* and a gentle introduction to the world of Hen-House Harry.

So Nigel, when did your desire to program videogames arise?
I was around 13 when one lunchtime at school I saw some kids going into this room. It was almost dark save for the glow of the green screens and all very secretive. So I managed to sneak in and watch the kids use the computers; eventually somebody let me on one and it was fantastic, like a whole new world. I was just absorbed by it for some reason.

So is this the point where the seeds for *Chuckie Egg* were sown?
Everybody was programming and there wasn't any software to speak of, so the only thing you could do was write your own. So, yes, it was kind of where it started. But they were expensive TRS-80s and the only computer I could dream of owning was a ZX81. Then I remember getting a leaflet about the Spectrum in advance of it coming out and we all sat at school drooling over this thing and its wonderful colours! I waited four months for it to turn up; I can't quite remember exactly the day it arrived but I imagine I was *unbelievably* excited.

So was this where your coding days began?
I had been programming in BASIC on the ZX81. Then I got a book on machine code and this opened up a whole new world as just the speed difference was so exhilarating to watch. I started programming on the Spectrum and had soon written a game called *Blaster*.

Was this *Rocket Raider*?
I called it *Blaster* and when the advert came out they'd changed the name. I didn't care because I'd got a game published and been paid for it, which was fantastic. It was a combination of my favourite arcade games at the time: *Defender* and *Scramble*.

What was it that made you decide to get C-Tech to publish *Blaster*?
A friend told me about this guy that might want to buy the game. They ran a shop, so I took it up to show them; I walked in and this guy was lying asleep on the counter! I announced myself, showed him *Blaster* and to my astonishment he raved about it and wanted to buy it immediately. He offered me £500 and I was just gob-smacked… I was 15 years old and getting £3.50 for my paper round, so I was just stunned silent. He took that to mean that the offer wasn't high enough, so he said 'alright, £600 then', and I just laughed. Again, he took that to mean the offer still wasn't high enough, so he upped his offer to £700! Then I stupidly spoke up and the guy wrote a cheque straight away. I took it home and when I showed it to my dad, it was the first time I recall him use the f-word. He couldn't believe it.

What was *Rocket Raider* actually like as a game?
I liked it and it didn't seem to have any massive bugs. But it was character-based movement and by the time I'd finished it I'd realised that there was a way to do pixel movement on the Spectrum. I knew from that moment that I wanted to [have] pixel movement in my next game.



SELECTED TIMELINE

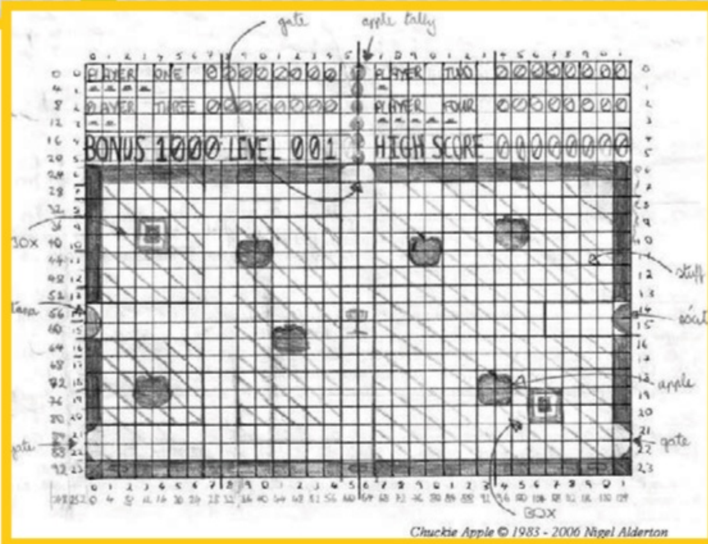
Rocket Raider (ZX Spectrum) 1983
Chuckie Egg (ZX Spectrum) 1984
Kong Strikes Back (ZX Spectrum) 1985
Street Hawk – Subscribers Edition (ZX Spectrum) 1985
Commando (ZX Spectrum) 1985
Ghosts 'N' Goblins (Amstrad CPC) 1986

"I'd got a game published and been paid for it, which was fantastic"

In the chair with...

Would you say that was one of the early driving forces behind *Chuckie Egg*?
Yes, and I'd already developed routines to do that and it just looked so much better, so much more fun and responsive to play as it would just move in little increments.

How did the idea of turning it into a platform game come about?
The two arcade games where all my ten pences were going were *Space Panic* and *Donkey Kong*. So I wrote a hybrid of those two games [and it] added to my dislike of games where there's a set path for each level. I like a game where it is all about dexterity and you can find your own way through.



» One of Nigel's original designs for *Chuckie Apple*.

Had you started working at A&F?
Yep, a friend of mine had a job in a computer shop and knew I was after a Saturday job, so he suggested I get in touch with A&F. They sold computers and games and in the back of their shop had two or three programmers writing games. To start with, I was getting the bacon butties and cups of tea, serving customers and generally helping out.

Did A&F encourage you to explore coding at all?
Not really. I was a kid making cups of tea and that was it. I pestered them and said 'would you look at my game?' and they would fob me off. Then eventually one Saturday I finally got their attention. I remember them being really impressed which was what I wanted; I needed somebody to say 'you're on the right track here'. Just a bit of encouragement.

So we imagine that, having demonstrated this soon-to-be-legendary game, A&F told you to forget about the tea and the bacon butties?
[laughs] They set up a little workstation for me and encouraged me to code during weekends and the school holidays. But it was too noisy and they kept trying to tell me what the structure of the game should be. I was determined that I was gonna do it how I wanted to do it and, in any case, their ideas were pretty daft.

Such as?
They had ideas like every fourth screen should have a *Frogger*-style level where Harry had to jump across logs to get to the next level. I was firm in my belief this would not work.

And presumably there wasn't a huge amount of space for such varied levels anyway?
Indeed. Because you've got such limited memory, I had mapped out what it was going to be used for. And the guys would chip in with ideas, basically because it wasn't finished and they thought I was asking them what should be in the game. But I wasn't, I was just saying 'what do you think of it so far?'.

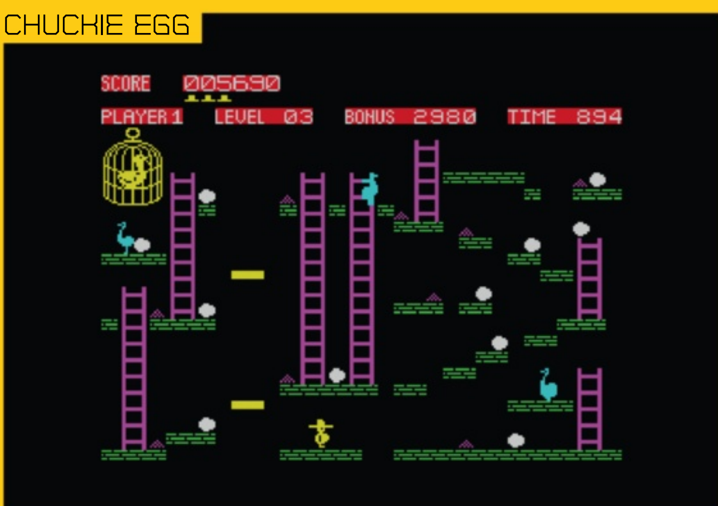
After having showed A&F the game, did it create any extra time pressure for you?
It got to the point where they wanted it finished and they said 'its finished, you don't need to put any more into it'. And there were just a few more little things that I wanted to do that would have extended the playing time of the game, but I never got the chance. It would have only taken a few more days…

So what was missing or different from the end game that you wish you'd changed or included?
Just a few little tweaks that I'd like to have done, like when you get more than five or six lives it still keeps count but you can't see them. It would have been nice to have a bigger hat that represented ten lives. I really should

FOUR TO PLAY

Classic games by Nigel you really need to revisit

CHUCKIE EGG



INSPIRED BY NIGEL'S adoration of the popular arcade games *Space Panic* and *Donkey Kong*, *Chuckie Egg* combined the common platform genre with a smooth playability that has ensured the game remains as enjoyable to play today as it was almost 30 years ago. Lacking the frustration and sheer pixel-perfect machinations of many of its peers, each of the game's levels had you dodging feathered nightmares and recovering eggs, occasionally collecting one of the piles of Road Runner-esque bird seed in order to pause the relentless timer. Despite only actually containing eight different screens, Nigel guaranteed *Chuckie Egg* had considerable longevity thanks to the roaming demon duck and a variety of different patterns for the smaller birds. Officially recognised as a classic, it dominates 'best of' lists for most of the platforms it was released on – most notably with the ZX Spectrum and BBC versions – and has inspired several remakes.

COMMANDO



ELITE SYSTEMS BECAME synonymous with arcade conversions in the mid-Eighties: *Paperboy*, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and *Space Harrier* were all technically amazing conversions and good games too. But *Commando* was where it all began. With the licence secured from Capcom, much rode on how the game would turn out – and *when* it would turn out. The two-man team of Nigel (who was still only 19 years old) and Keith Burkhill worked overtime to produce the Spectrum version in time for Christmas 1985, and despite the pressure they were under, they produced an impressive (if rather yellow) version of the arcade run-and-gun.

KONG STRIKES BACK



BEFORE IT MADE its name as a purveyor of mercurial licensed games, Ocean managed to riff unofficially on two separate arcade games in 1984, with *Donkey Kong* helping to provide the name and *Mr Do's Wild Ride* the gameplay. Along with legendary Spectrum coder, Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith (who sadly died in June 2010), Nigel helped develop this graphically quaint clone that, despite its derivative nature, remains sweetly playable and one of Ocean's better earlier games. A solid game that remains a lot of fun to play.

GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS



CONVINCED THAT A credible version of the arcade medieval fantasy epic was not possible, Nigel passed on the Spectrum version and volunteered to lend his skills to Elite's Amstrad CPC port. Now working on his own, the graphics were created separately by another freelancer, Ste Pickford, although he was hamstrung by Nigel resorting to a restricted screen mode in order to avoid masking the sprites. The result was not particularly pleasing on the eye, yet the game was admirably fast and fun to play, making it not quite the soporific end to his programming career that Nigel suggests.

> **"** The two arcade games where all my ten pences were going were Space Panic and Donkey Kong **"**

have put a pause key in, that was a stupid thing not to do. Other than that, I thought there was easily enough scope to get another eight screens. The platforms would remain the same due to memory, but place a few bricks differently so if people were used to a particular route, all of a sudden that route wouldn't work.

Retro Gamer fondly remembers the first time the giant bird comes out of its cage. You're playing all through the first few levels thinking, 'oh that big bird up in the cage it's just a bit of decoration…'
That was the idea!

Then the other birds disappear and the big one's come out of the cage after us! That was quite cool, was it tricky to implement?
It was easy to make it home in on the player but I wanted it so that the bird had momentum, meaning you could lead it astray. But I do wish I'd written it so that when you went back to screen one the first time, the game plays normally for a few seconds before the bird comes out. So it looks like 'oh this is easy, no enemies' and then suddenly you're being hounded across the screen. Slightly more dramatic.

Somewhat unusually for the time, *Chuckie Egg* had four players.
I did that because I like the atmosphere in an arcade where one person is playing and you get two or three people watching. It's what I was doing and it was lots of fun. I knew lots of people would buy the game and would have their mates round to play it and if you got three friends it was cool if you could all play it on one computer.



» [Spectrum] Nigel's first game, the shoot-'em-up, *Rocket Raider*.

Was A&F paying you anything at this point?
They told me they wanted to publish it and they put me on a retainer of £50 a month with the idea that they'd get first dibs on the game.

What was with Harry's big hat?
I'm rubbish at drawing! But actually the algorithms for the collision detection had to be simple, or rather the game was faster and better if they were simple. The wide hat meant the now 'square character' didn't make it so frustrating when you thought you'd actually evaded a bird.

The lifts in *Chuckie Egg* were presumably influenced by *Donkey Kong*. They could be a bit tricky – were you happy with them?
Not entirely… I struggled to get the algorithm right to get on and off and in the end I had to make the tolerances so big that if you got anywhere near a lift it kind of grabs you and places you on it. But also, if you walk off the lift your momentum doesn't carry you on to the platform so I probably should've done a bit of horizontal momentum to take you off the lift and to safety.

On the other hand, Harry could fall a long way without harm…



» [Spectrum] Before you took to the streets in *Street Hawk* there was this odd mini-game to play.



» [Spectrum] Nigel had no involvement in "*Chocky Egg*" – *Chuckie Egg 2*.

I think I just didn't like things like that and found them frustrating to play. More realistic, but less fun. Although you could still die by falling through the gaps in the floor in later levels, so the player still had to be cautious.

***Chuckie Egg* was ported to other computers. Were you involved in any of the other conversions?**
No. I believe Mike Webb wrote most of them and Doug Anderson wrote the BBC and Electron versions. They did proper maths for the arc of the man which I kicked myself for not doing.

After the game was released, were you still working in the A&F shop?
For a short time. But on the back of *Chuckie Egg* I got the day job at Ocean which was partly to appease my parents because I was determined not to go to university. The compromise was to get a proper job.

But you were already working on a new game based on another arcade game?
A&F were keen to do a sequel quickly and they had lots of ideas which I didn't like. So I just said 'you do what you want but I want nothing to do with it'. But *Chuckie Apple*, which was inspired by *Mr Do*, was definitely going to be more about pushing things about and dexterity. I abandoned it when I joined Ocean.

Who did you work with while you were at Ocean?
I was in a room with Jonathan Smith and we wrote *Kong Strikes Back* together. Then we got split up and I got moved into a different cubicle with Mike Webb and we wrote *Street Hawk* between us. 'Joffa' was nice but I think I was a bit mean to him really. He was incredibly talented as a programmer and as a graphic artist whereas I could only program. As a result he concentrated mostly on the graphics, probably because I pushed him into it. I'm not sure if that's totally true, but I always felt I sort of bullied him into doing that. I didn't let him code, and once we'd split up he went on to write these fantastic games.

With your next Ocean game, *Street Hawk*, there was a bit of a fuss over the game being promised as a gift when you subscribed to *Crash* magazine. Do you recall there being any particular pressure surrounding its development?
I think the problem with the game was it was a bit sparse… we wanted it to be a bit slick and it was. That's from memory, as since coding it I don't think I've ever seen the thing. But there didn't seem to be a lot to do in the game. I vaguely remember it being a hell of a rush before we even started; we were told to write a game, not quite in three weeks but not far off it.

You then left Ocean?
I had decided to go freelance and was in contact with Steve Wilcox from Elite Systems. Christmas was approaching and the story went that he had virtually bet the company on their next release, which was an arcade conversion called *Commando*. So Steve hired myself and Keith Burkhill to write the Spectrum version which was on deadline for Christmas. I was offered a contract and resigned from Ocean in a rush to get started. I remember feeling bad because when I went to hand my notice in, two other people that day had already handed in theirs. So this guy got a knock on the door from me and his first words were 'oh God not you as well'.



» [Spectrum] Like *Chuckie Egg*, *Commando* loops around, only with more and more enemies to contend with.



» [Spectrum] The lovely loading screen for *Commando*.

What was the contract like?
It was £10,000 upfront fee with a penalty of £1,000 each day we were late. The target was something like nine weeks and it sounds unbelievable – but it was true and a lot of pressure right from the start. It also gives you an idea of the pressure Elite was under and Steve was passing this pressure onto us. Keith and I – who had never met each other before – said, 'let's hit the ground running, work really hard to start off with so it won't be so tough at the end'. So we did, and had a strict regime from the start, working all hours. It was absolutely crazy.

As you were both freelance, where were you working from?
From Elite's office in Walsall. We were living in a guest house near the M6 called The Larches, and would get up in the morning, go to the office, work until afternoon, have dinner, work in the evening, go back to The Larches, sleep for a few hours, have breakfast before the same the next day. It was the hardest I'd worked in my life.

Did you not look at the arcade machine and think: 'Bloody hell, how am I going to get this onto a Spectrum?'
Yes! But by now I'd learned a lot of tricks, ways of getting things quicker and using less memory. Mike Webb and I had realised that the fastest way of changing memory was by putting the stack on the screen, pushing stuff onto it and that's changing the display. But then you've got to be careful because when the 50th second refresh comes round, stuff gets pushed onto the stack by the system, so you've got to make sure it's off the screen at that point or it gets interrupted and crashes the game.

NUMBER *CRUNCHING

ZX81, the first computer Nigel owned

£700, the sum Nigel cannily negotiated for his first game, Rocket Raider

£1,000 per day penalty for every day Commando ran over its deadline

9 and a bit weeks – not a dodgy rip-off erotic thriller, but the time it took Keith Burkhill and Nigel to complete Commando

4 the choice of possible replacements offered by Crash to those disgruntled subscribers who actually wanted Street Hawk and also the number of players who could join in the fun in Chuckie Egg

17 years old – Nigel's age when Chuckie Egg was released in early 1984

200 The number of paper rounds Nigel would have needed to do to earn the same amount of money he got for Rocket Raider

Did you and Keith have specific roles during development?
Keith did the logic for the men running around and shooting and I did the coding for the sprites to try and get the speed up. I remember showing Mike Webb the scrolling bridge I'd designed, having worked out a way you could have the leading edge pushed on the screen but then the bulk of the bridge just as blocks of colour, which was a single byte and took up very little memory. He was really impressed, so I thought, 'if Mike's impressed we're definitely onto something here!'

Were there any compromises you had to make to fit the Spectrum version in?
I remember we had two bites of the cherry as far as the men running around and the difficulty of it, because when it first came out it was apparently far too easy and some kid had completed it in a day. So Keith had to come back after we'd finished the game, mastered it and even sold a few copies, just to make the game harder.

How did you go about learning the maps and layouts?
We had a *Commando* machine in the office set to freeplay. One of us would be playing it and the other would be drawing the map and details on a piece of paper. There were no engineers from Capcom helping us – it was all copied by eye.

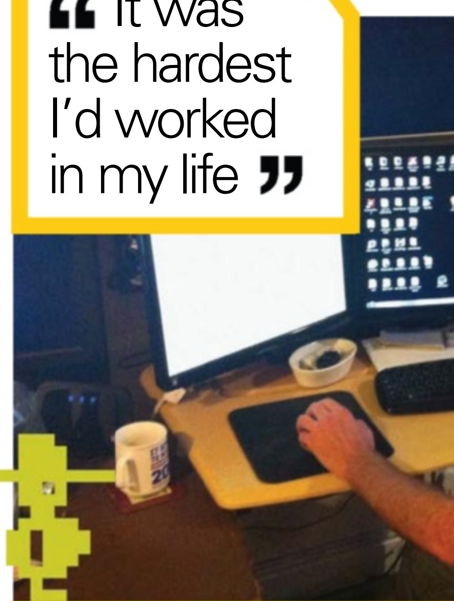
Did you meet your deadline?
We were two-and-a-half days late but Steve didn't invoke the clause. We reckoned the threat had already done its job. And it was only that late because we'd had one last bug to solve and couldn't find it. There was a girl working for Elite called Karen Trueman who would always get the game to crash and it was only her that seemed to trigger it! In the end we thought she was cursed or had static electricity or something. We eventually discovered it was because she struggled to get through the bridge section and would pause there. I was pushing all the data onto the screen using the stack and I'd misjudged it by two bytes; it was running over into memory it shouldn't do and corrupting the screen, causing the crash. It wasn't witchcraft, it wasn't her… [laughs] it was my code…

After *Commando*, you were behind another Elite arcade conversion, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*…
Yeah, but I was just mentally hammered. In the last days of *Commando* I remember working through the day and night and then again the next day and night and driving home and collapsing. I really needed six months off, but I agreed to do *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, not much more than a month after *Commando*.

But this wasn't the Spectrum version was it?
Actually I did the Amstrad version. I think I wanted a bit of a change and also I couldn't see how the game could be converted to the Spectrum, especially the diagonal scrolling in the later levels. So I told Steve I'd do the Amstrad version, which of course had the benefit of extra hardware support. It was interesting learning a new machine but even at this point I was struggling to motivate myself. Keith did a technically amazing job with the Spectrum version.

Were you still freelance?
Yes, and I was back at home now having rented myself a little room above a Post Office. It was a pretty miserable and lonely existence to be honest, and I struggled to put in the hours. I didn't want to let anyone down but just couldn't motivate myself and I think it shows in the game.

> "It was the hardest I'd worked in my life"



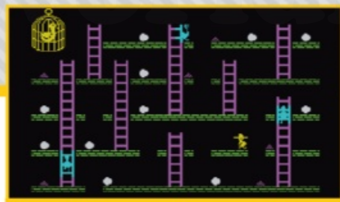
» Will Nigel ever make a new game? We'll have to wait and see.

After these two Elite games, it's difficult to see much else you were involved in. Had you burned out?
Definitely. I wanted a complete change and had had enough of programming. I was still in contact with Steve and I was round his house one day, chatting about his workload. He was doing a hell of a lot on his own, managing all the staff as well as running the business. I said to him, 'you need a software development manager' – someone to keep track of programmers, deadlines and schedules – he thought I was pitching for the job and offered me the full-time role of software coordinator. I was phoning around the programmers, keeping track of their progress and when they sent in games I'd test them and give feedback. But I wanted to move, I wanted to be a software development manager properly, so applied for job at Audiogenic in London and moved down there. I was software manager there so had moved into management, rather than a mere supervising role.

How did you feel in these new roles?

It was what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be coding, I wanted to have what I saw as a proper job.

What happened next?
After about three years at Audiogenic, I wanted to get out of the games industry completely. Having always loved the idea of computers being able to talk to each other, a friend got me involved in the networking industry and I've been doing that ever since in one form or another.



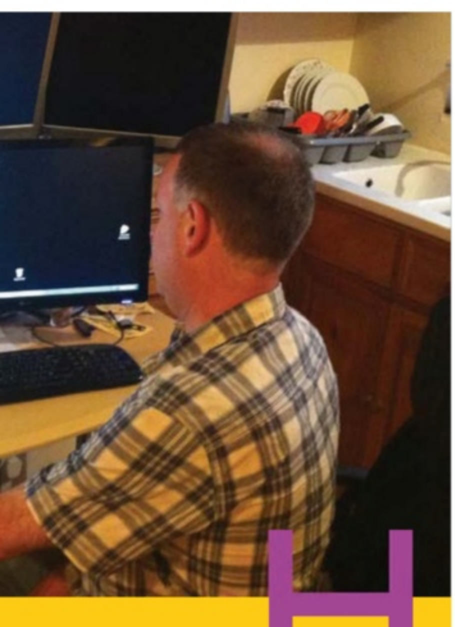
» An old **Retro Gamer** survey saw Nigel's brilliant platformer winng by receiving 42 per cent of the votes.

Do you have any regrets about leaving the software industry?
I was in contact with people from the games industry and would hear snippets and it seemed to get a lot more commercial after I left. I don't think I have any particular talent as a businessman and working as a programmer when you're just a cog in a machine wouldn't have been for me either. The fun part of it was the early days when people like me and my next-door neighbour could write a little game about a rabbit travelling around the world, put an advert in a magazine and sell it for £4.50 a tape… so, no, I don't think I regret leaving the industry.

With the prospect of a long-lost Alderton classic to hunt down, we ask Nigel how he looks back at his greatest achievement.
I got a huge buzz the first time I saw *Chuckie Egg* on a shop shelf but it wasn't really about that. The biggest thrill for me was that people enjoyed playing it and I still like that today, that it's popular and people are still helping Harry dodge birds and collect eggs.

And with that, Retro Gamer proffers its thanks to Nigel who kindly wishes us a safe journey home as we head for the eggs-it. Sorry, couldn't resist.

Many thanks to Bagshot Row, The *Chuckie Egg* Professional's Resource Kit site. Check it out at www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg. We also recommend *Atomic Chuckie Egg*, a port of the Electron version to one Acorn machine that didn't receive an original release, the Atom. It can be downloaded from www.retrosoftware.co.uk/atomicce.





» [Amstrad] It wasn't the prettiest game, but *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* was perfectly playable on the Amstrad CPC.

* YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

They're a very knowledgeable lot the **Retro Gamer** readers, so we opened the floor and asked them to test every facet of Nigel's memory…

Joefish: Did you know that in the Spectrum version of *Chuckie Egg*, if you start Level Three holding Right, run right, jump the gap, climb the ladder and run left (all without stopping) you can run straight through the bird there? Feature or bug?
Really? [Laughs] I'll have to test that out. So to answer the question, yes it was a feature. Which level was it again?

Paranoid Marvin: Why a crazy duck in the cage and not a hen or a chicken?
Is it? Probably down to my drawing skills, or lack of. I guess the bill gives it away!



» [Spectrum] All that seed… might as well pick it up or the bird will scoff it.

Joefish: How many people phoned up to complain they couldn't use the ladders, and had to be told to hold Up as you run past?
Funnily enough, my Dad first tried the game after I'd finished it and I remember watching him struggle to use the ladders. At the time I got quite frustrated watching him, assuming it was just because he wasn't a games player; but I realised afterwards it could have worked a bit better.

psj3089: How did you do that classic 'squelch' noise when you pick up the bird seed? Sounds like someone who's had a dodgy curry…
[Laughs] That was the Spectrum for you… anything that sounded a bit different was a bonus!

Joefish: What species are the walking blue birds?
Ostriches. Don't ask me why.

Eric: Why is *Chuckie Egg* not called *Hen-House Harry*?
Eggy Kong was my title and A&F changed it to *Chuckie Egg*. I'd never heard of it before but apparently it's a northern phrase that just means egg. They thought it was a brilliant name and I was quite happy because I thought my name was a bit rubbish.

Joefish: Was the intention with *Commando* to get as close to the arcade game as possible, or to make a more playable game for the home? As it certainly turned out to be the latter and was a much better game because of it.
We actually tried to copy the game as closely as possible. Keith [Burkhill] might be a better guy to ask.

psj3089: Do you feel guilty that I didn't get great exam results in school because I was addicted to *Chuckie Egg* and *Commando*?
[Laughs] Please don't sue me! If it helps, I was supposed to be revising for my exams when I was writing *Chuckie Egg*…

Joefish: Were you meant to be able to jump across the lift shafts? It's incredibly hard to get it just right to do so.
Crikey, this guy likes *Chuckie Egg* a lot doesn't he? And no, you weren't. I wanted it so that you needed to 'bounce' across a lift. Obviously I didn't quite succeed.

Merman: Do you still play your old games?
Only recently I played a few online, mainly spurred on by talking to **Retro Gamer**. Haven't they got funny names your readers?


1UP
6.20SEC



Bishi Bashi Special

CRAZY HYPER MINI-GAME MANIA

RETROREVIVAL



» **PlayStation**
» **Konami**
» **1998**

These days, you can't shake a Wiimote without hitting a multiplayer mini-game collection, but when *Bishi Bashi Special* introduced its inspired lunacy to a European audience it really did make you gawp and grin in equal measure.

Suddenly you were replacing severed lips on sumo wrestlers, differentiating between aliens and girls in hot-tubs and helping Jeremy Beadle's Japanese cousin to devour giant peas. Sushi Gulper, Ladder Of Love, Left And Right Jumping Girl… don't the game names alone make you want to play them?

There are plenty of nods to games past, with skits on *Simon*, *Breakout* and, best of all, a bizarre reimagining of the javelin event from *Track And Field*, which has a bride hurling pies at the wedding congregation, the groom holding her bridal train as she launches her custard bouquet. You'll also notice the debt *WarioWare* owes to this pioneering surrealism. Button-mashing to bring a flower into bloom, fulfilling fast food orders at speed and beat-matching with an afro-sporting disco dude all went on to find a home in Nintendo's wonderful micro-game series.

Though you can play *Bishi Bashi Special* alone, an eight-player round robin tournament is the perfect party game. Not only will the experience of playing Jump For The Meat, which involves a bald and bronzed body-builder in Speedos bouncing on a pogo-stick and gobbling pork, be a defining moment in your collective friendship, you'll soon find yourself chanting 'Attention!' in unison before every new challenge. Trust me on this. ✱



RETRORATED



>> Well here's a pleasant surprise, a ground-breaking and exciting platformer that has nothing to do with Mario. We also catch up with the HD remake of Wind Waker and revisit Sega's Castle Of Illusion



PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD
A great game receives an impressive HD update. We'd like *Metroid Prime* next please.



DAVID
Castle Of Illusion
Sega Studios Australia has delivered a highly entertaining platformer that easily captures the fun of the Mega Drive hit.



» [PS3] The art style manages to adapt to both 2D and 3D fairly seamlessly, making every screenshot look like concept art.

Rayman Legends

UBISOFT CHALLENGES MARIO AS THE NEW 2D CHAMPION

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** 360, WII U, PS VITA, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Rayman* started life on the original PlayStation in 1995, with the Jaguar version hot on its heels, and ended up becoming a massive hit on the system, eventually leading to a belated 1999 3D sequel. The main series remained 3D-focussed until a couple of years ago, when *Origins* returned to basics for Michel Ancel's creation.



***Rayman Legends* sets out to be more than a retro platformer with a modern sheen like we've seen resurge in the past decade. Rather than just settling into that *New Super Mario Bros*-style vein, Ubisoft's sequel to *Rayman Origins* feels like it has something new to say about the genre, experimenting with audio in a fascinating way and harbouring the kind of heart-racing, unpredictable pace that makes *Legends* a title worth treasuring.**

Built in the same fashion as *Origins* yet with a more ambitious spread of levels and features, *Legends* utilises a visual engine that blends 2D and 3D together almost seamlessly – nothing new really, in that regard, but the way it's used in design terms far exceeds anything else we've seen in the 2D revival movement on modern consoles, both technically and creatively.

Every kind of 2D platforming stage forms a part of *Rayman Legends*, but it's the imaginative splendour behind each that gives them a contemporary brilliance. The set of levels based on Mexico's Day of the Dead, for example, has the expected visual motifs of skulls and other associated imagery, but also has Rayman and friends running through a kingdom of giant cakes where your companion Murfy has to clear paths through them by eating tunnels out of them. The cake then re-grows in a stop-motion claymation-type effect around you, and can squash you to death if you don't get out of there – it's death by baking, and there are so many other instances like this where far-out imagery and smart level design come together.

It's not simply the predictable fire, water and ice levels or generic spins on simple ideas – there are nuances in the design within levels that have a unifying theme, and the pacing can completely differ from moment to moment unexpectedly. Some are painfully fast, others are annoyingly precise and some even require genuine lateral thinking in terms of your abilities; *Rayman Legends* marches to the beat of its own drum, yet the setting is inviting and the amount of content so giving that the experience never feels anything less than universally positive. It's simply a nice context to exist within, and replaying levels feels natural rather than arduous due to this higher level of variety.

Legends has a kind of oddness that's very much its own, evident in animations like Rayman's companion, Murfy, slapping



» [PS3] Kung Foot is the best time waster of *Legends*' many helpings of bonus content, though you'll invest more time in replaying levels.



» [PS3] If you're playing single-player, there's no reason whatsoever that you should be playing as Rayman's arbitrarily designed pals.



» [PS3] Levels dovetail with usual themes but handle them in unexpectedly creative ways.



» [PS3] The destructible parts of the environment offer a lot of interesting solutions to reach the finish line.

the eyeballs of enemies to get them to help you along in your path, or some of the Teensies you need to collect getting a rather hefty beating from enemies prior to your rescue of them. It's not dark, as such, yet there's a pervading *Ren And Stimpy*-like weirdness that means *Rayman* never feels specifically targeted towards kids – though naturally they'll like it anyway. Such additions simply add to the game's confident sense of artistic identity.

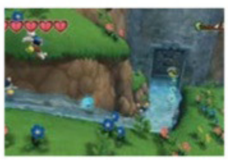
The sound design may even be more impressive than the visuals, always making your living room sound like it's full of people with "woo!" sound effects responding to your character doing something vaguely remarkable during a level as well as a soundtrack heavy on group singing and whistling. There's a handful of musical themed levels, too, that move rhythmically to *Rayman* versions of retro tracks, like Ram Jam's thoroughly irritating *Black Betty* and others that we won't spoil here – and hell, they're so well-executed in form that we're sure Ubisoft could do an entire game just based on those.

Yet in the context of *Rayman* as a series, *Legends* really does feel like it has 18 years of progress over the original, and while the visuals are a huge part of that, this sequel also demonstrates Ancel's growth as a creator in exploring every possibility of what a 2D platformer can make the player feel. It's not simply about challenge and momentum – *Legends* is also about wonder, and invoking that within its audience using every weapon at its disposal. This is a generously imaginative work that has the hallmarks of a passionate, forward-thinking team behind it.

It's certainly no slouch when it comes to ancillary content – aside from a generous slice of basic single-player levels, *Legends* has a lot of bonus asides, some of which are entirely frivolous time killers (a strongly designed football game that may end up swallowing too many precious hours) and other bits that are nothing short of superb additions, like a whole slew of levels from *Origins* piled in for value's sake. Better still, the latter is unlocked through one of *Legends'* more fun ideas: scratch cards, obtained during levels and clearly intended for the Wii U's GamePad to rub off, but fun to uncover nonetheless. Having the single-player surrounded by this immense bevy of extra content only makes Legends feel more complete. Creator Michel Ancel has long discussed the potential development of a follow-up to his other more well-regarded creation, *Beyond Good And Evil*. While that's something we hope to see emerge someday, *Legends* shows that *Rayman* clearly offers the team at Ubisoft Montpellier enormous creative capacity for design in the 2D platformer that we thought lost from the genre, something to say in a genre that has a tendency to feel quite static in its progression. If *Origins* showed that Ancel's team remembered how to make a great side-scrolling game starring the limbless icon, then *Legends* marks the moment they reached the head of the pack.
Samuel Roberts

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
KLONOA (PLAYSTATION)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U (WII U)



In a nutshell

A love letter to 2D platformers that has a refreshingly ambitious approach to level creation, *Rayman Legends* is a retro revival that's a cut above. *Legends* has the creative drive of an indie game married to the production values of a blockbuster – brilliant stuff.

>> Score **93%**

Highlights from Michel's back catalogue



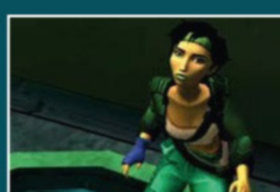
Rayman (1995)

Released on multiple formats, *Rayman* found its biggest audience on Sony's PlayStation as a sharp 2D platformer on a console that lacked that type of game, with its titular limbless protagonist finding favour with his unconventional visual design and distinctive platforming style.



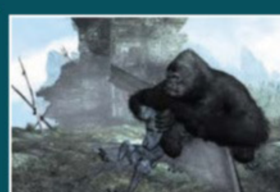
Rayman 2 (1999)

Four years later, Rayman returned in a totally different guise as one of the better non-*Mario 64* 3D platformers of the day. It's been ported to a variety of different systems over the years, yet remains strongest on PlayStation where you can at least wrestle with the game's difficult camera angles.



Beyond Good & Evil (2003)

A jack-of-all-trades that combined an appreciation of nature with driving, combat, puzzles and other stuff wrapped up in a big sci-fi epic. A cult hit, it sold very badly on PS2, Xbox and GameCube after releasing at a horrendously busy time of year.



Peter Jackson's King Kong (2005)

Nominated to create the tie-in to the overlong and mostly rubbish *King Kong* remake by director Peter Jackson, Michel oversaw a short-yet-interesting action game that both showed the perspective of events from the humans and briefly put players in control of the giant ape, too.



Rayman Origins (2011)

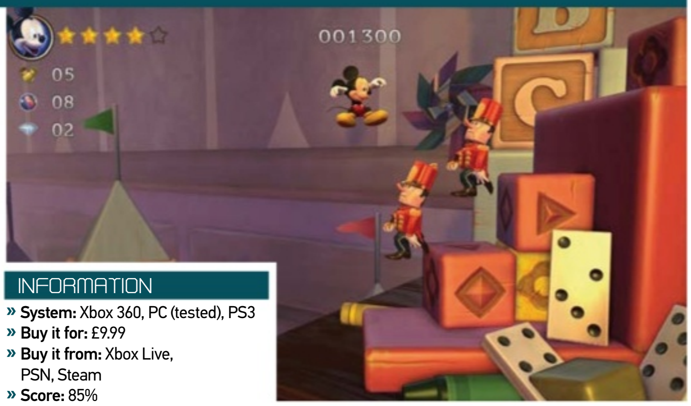
After a year of pre-production on the as-yet-unseen *Beyond Good & Evil 2*, Michel Ancel returned with a smaller-scale title that harked back to the original Nineties *Rayman* while making the most of today's technology to ensure it would be relevant to a larger audience.

RETRO ROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION
» **System:** Xbox 360, PC (tested), PS3
» **Buy it for:** £9.99
» **Buy it from:** Xbox Live, PSN, Steam
» **Score:** 85%

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

We'll admit to being a little unsure about *Castle Of Illusion* when it was first announced. The graphics didn't feel right, while there were concerns that Sega Studios Australia would lose site of what made the Mega Drive original so enjoyable to play in the first place. After playing through the game several times, those early concerns simply evaporated.

Castle Of Illusion is a complete delight to play, easily capturing the feel and fun of the original Mega Drive game. Structurally it's very similar to the Mega Drive game with mostly identical levels and the same bosses to battle. Sega has worked hard to expand on these for today's audience, however.

When an apple chases Mickey during the first level it becomes an in-to-the-screen frantic dash. Sweet World has also been greatly expanded, with pools of cookies to jump across and waterfalls to avoid. The bosses are also far better, offering a little more skill to beat, but still staying true to their 16-bit roots.

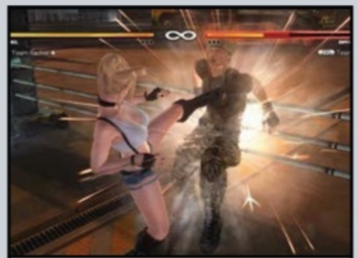
Graphically it's of a very high standard, with Mickey looking superb as he saunters through the beautifully recreated environments. Animation throughout is excellent, with certain levels looking truly stunning. The audio is also extremely strong, with slick adaptations of the original tunes, which have also been included for purists. Add in some fun narration and *Castle Of Illusion* really does feel like a cartoon come to life, just like it did all those years ago.

Yes it's easy (clocking in at around two hours), but so was the original. Longevity is at least ensured thanks to the inclusion of speed-runs and several costumes to collect, making it easily worth the £10 asking price. The controls don't feel quite as tight as the original, and the lack of the Mega Drive game is disappointing (but not entirely unexpected), but there's no denying that this is an excellent update of a 16-bit classic. Highly recommended.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Astro Wars
» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £1.49
» **Buy it from:** AppStore, Google Play
» **Score:** 72%
» Fans of the old tabletop game from Grandstand will be highly impressed with this accurate iOS port. It looks superb, sounds annoyingly authentic and features every stage and the ship docking from the original game. There's an option to use a digital version of the control stick, but it's very unwieldy and you'll soon resort to the larger arrow keys available. The clunky controls are a shame, but this is still great fun.



Dead Or Alive 5 Ultimate
» **System:** PS3 (tested) Xbox 360
» **Buy it for:** £44.99
» **Buy it from:** Online/Retail
» **Score:** 70%
» Team Ninja returns to its slick fighter and introduces five new characters – including *Ninja Gaiden*'s Momiji and Rachel and *Virtua Fighter*'s Jacky Bryant – a host of unlockable costumes and several new gameplay mechanics. Existing characters have brand new combos, while Tag mode has been greatly enhanced. A very decent package, particularly if you never managed to pick up the original.



Chaos Engine
» **System:** PC (tested) Mac
» **Buy it for:** £6.99
» **Buy it from:** Steam
» **Score:** 70%
» Well this is a tad disappointing. The Bitmap Bros' classic overhead shooter has been updated for a new generation of gamers, but very little has been done to it. The visuals are awful, using an annoying filter that smudges out the game's gorgeous pixel work (thankfully the original art is still there) and only online play and eight-way control are genuine improvements. It's still a good shooter, but there's little here to justify buying it if you own the original.



Diablo III
» **System:** Xbox 360 (tested) PS3
» **Buy it for:** £49.99
» **Buy it from:** Online/Retail
» **Score:** 81%
» Blizzard's hit action-RPG makes its way to consoles but loses something in translation. Special mention must go to the controls that make selecting weapons and managing inventory surprisingly intuitive. This hasn't translated as well to combat, which doesn't feel as precise as when playing with a mouse. Online is solid, but Blizzard's epic game does feel diminished somewhat after experiencing it on PC.



The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD



» **System:** Wii U » **Buy it for:** £44.99 » **Buy it from:** Online/Retail » **Score:** 90%

Nintendo's most controversial *Zelda* games sails onto Wii U with a spanky HD makeover. The first thing that hits you is just how beautiful everything looks. While the original GameCube style is as timeless as ever, it's amazing how nice *The Wind Waker* now looks in motion (it's certainly slicker than early screenshots would have you believe). *The Wind Waker* has been improved sonically as well, with rejigged tunes that sound far cleaner than before.

GamePad support is included, making it extremely easy to switch between items and maps. It's also a lot easier to change weapons, as you can simply flick them upwards while fighting – very useful. Sailing has been greatly sped up, while a greatly challenging Hero Mode is available from the get go. A very polished update of a classic adventure game.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



Bugs are a pain. Titanium on the TI-99/4A has a nasty one that breaks the scrolling and, although it only crops up occasionally, the frustration of making progress and then losing it as the game falls over is painful. The game has been marked down to reflect this but would have scored higher otherwise, so I'll add a note in a future issue if the problem gets sorted out



FORMAT: ATARI 8-BIT
DEVELOPER: FRANTISEK HOURA
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ALIEN-A8
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



» [Atari 8-bit] And all this science, I don't understand.



» [Atari 8-bit] Up, up, down, down, left, right…



» [Atari 8-bit] We'll just put this here.

ALIEN 8

STAND BY TO REPEL THE RODENT DAVROS!

Back in the mists of time and far across ridiculous distances of space, a now long-forgotten race of highly intelligent beings found themselves facing the destruction of their world. To save everything they had achieved, a huge ark-style spaceship was constructed and loaded to capacity with every scrap of knowledge, samples of the world's flora and fauna and the cryogenically stored bodies of their very brightest minds. Their destination was hundreds of light years away and, despite travelling at hyper warp, the journey was planned to last aeons. So *Alien 8*, a sentient droid that was the pinnacle of their technology, was loaded on board to babysit.

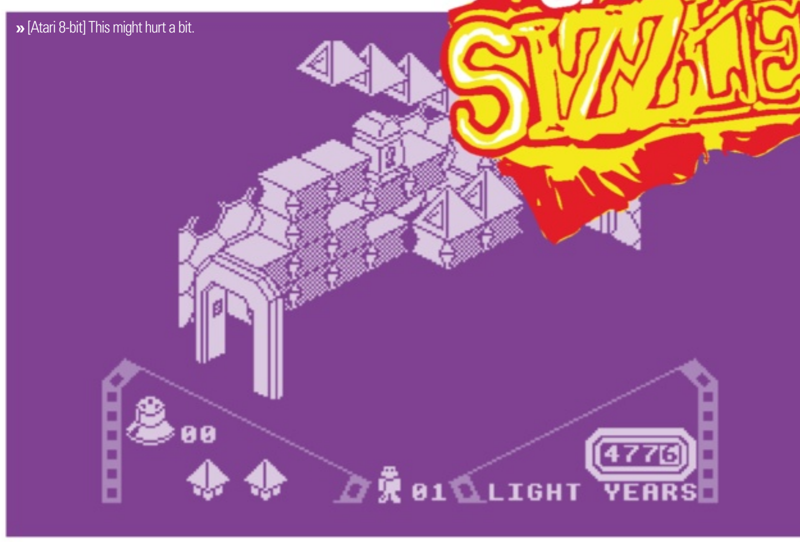
These 'cryonaughts' are finally closing in on the planet chosen as their new home but, as the computer begins to slow the ark down to make planet fall, it comes under attack and all of the life support systems are sabotaged. The programming to deal with the situation is downloaded to *Alien 8* which then sets off to replace all of the thermolec valves and make sure that the cryogenic systems are fully active, all the while avoiding damage from the invading hazards that are now roaming around the ship.

Alien 8 himself can be directly controlled by the player with the joystick; left and right on the controller will rotate him 90 degrees at a time, up moves forwards, the fire button makes him jump and down will pick up an object; despite this simplicity it'll take some practice to get used to the controls, in particular using the variable height jump and making quick turns between two hops. The locations within the ark are displayed in isometric 3D using Ultimate's Filmation engine and for newcomers to the game there will be quite a bit of trial and error required as, along with finding the safest route through each room, they figure out which blocks are collapsible or able to push the robot around.

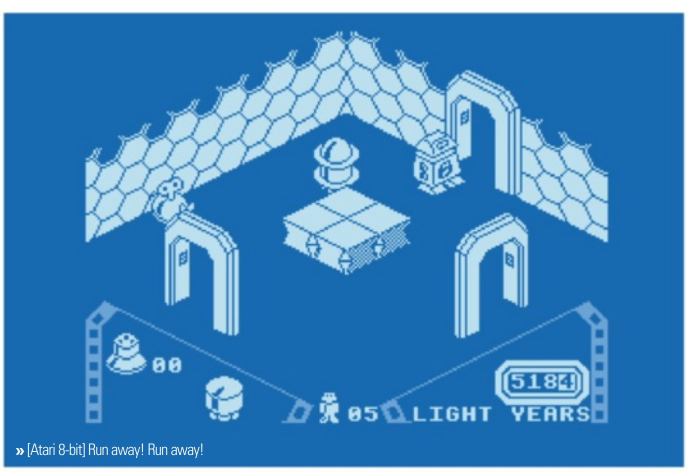
Playing the game on a standard 64K Atari 8-bit proves sluggish on the busier screens, but developer Frantisek 'Fandal' Houra has written it so that if a 128K or larger memory is found, the game will use that extra space to speed things up. The in-game sound is slightly beefed up from the Spectrum with some simple spot effects including a nice metallic footfall as the droid stomps around each screen, but a decent POKEY rendition of Linkin Park's *Numb* has replaced the original's title page tune.

Alien 8 was very well received on release by Spectrum fans and this conversion is pretty faithful to the original, so anybody who enjoys challenges like *Head Over Heels* on the Atari 8-bit should give it a try; it's frustrating, has a fairly steep learning curve and even with one of the maps online is easy to get lost in, but this is still an addictive and satisfying challenge.

90%



» [Atari 8-bit] This might hurt a bit.

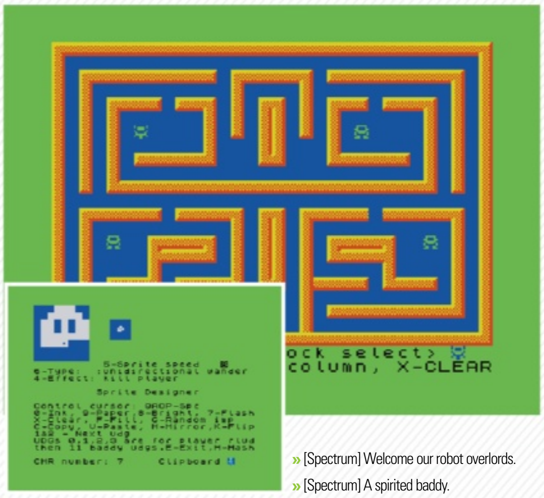


» [Atari 8-bit] Run away! Run away!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

CLASSIC GAME DESIGNER



» [Spectrum] Welcome our robot overlords.

» [Spectrum] A spirited baddy.

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** DAVID HUGHES
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/CGD-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

Classic Game Designer **(*CGD*)** is a tool by David Hughes that was created to produce the kind of Spectrum action game released in the early Eighties. Pretty much every element in a *CGD* game is one character in size and moves in one character steps. The various editors for graphics, screen layouts and cosmetic details like in-game text are all simple but functional and one feature we found useful was the sprite tool's 'random imp' option, which produces all manner of enemy or player sprites.

It doesn't have the flexibility of other game creation tools, but since it was originally designed around creating entries for the annual comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition, that wasn't really the developer's intention. Games produced with *CGD* can be fun to play and, while we'd recommend reading the manual and watching the tutorial RZX before getting started, the process of making a game can also be enjoyable.

87%

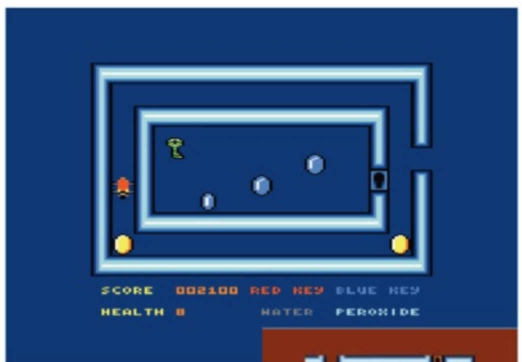
LAB ESCAPE

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** EGO TRIP
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/LAB-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE

Lab Escape **is** the first released game to be developed with the Amstrad CPC version of *Arcade Game Designer* and is a top-down maze game. There's been a disaster at the local chemical lab which has mutated most of the inhabitants, created deadly pools of acid and set parts of the building on fire. Getting out in one piece means avoiding anything harmful, collecting three colour-coded keys and items that will help with any hazards.

There's less than a dozen screens in total and, although there is some trial and error required to work out exactly what needs to be done and the faster-paced enemies take practice to manoeuvre around, the game dishes out what is essentially nine lives and that means escaping to safety while grabbing every single gold coin along the way shouldn't really be an arduous task. What's there is reasonable but we would have liked to see more actual gameplay.

70%





» [Spectrum] I have seen the writing on the wall.





» [System] There's so many of them!

» [System] A spot of product placement.

TITANIUM

» **FORMAT:** TEXAS TI99/4A » **DEVELOPER:** RASMUS MOUSTGAARD
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/TITANIUM-TEXAS » **PRICE:** FREE

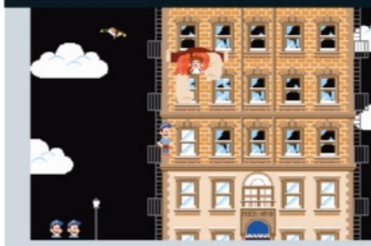
We've mentioned Rasmus Moustgaard's TI-99/4A smooth scrolling tests previously and somehow he's already finished an actual game that utilises those ideas. *Titanium* is a vertically scrolling *Goldrunner*-style shoot-'em-up where a spacecraft must fly over vast dreadnoughts while destroying ground targets, weaving through gaps and either avoiding or shooting plenty of airborne defences.

The difficulty level has been set pretty high and there is a floaty feel to the controls that requires some acclimatisation and makes steering safely through the four levels more challenging than on similar games. *Titanium* will be enjoyable for the more hardened shoot-'em-up players and somewhat frustrating for everybody else, but it's worth any TI-99/4A fan giving it a try to see what their machine is capable of. It's worth noting there's a fairly serious bug in our build, so you may want to wait for an update before you download it.

63%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Mega Drive] Can we fix it?

Gonna wreck it

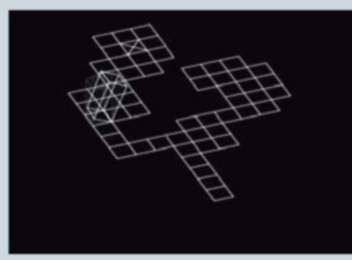
Fans of Disney's *Wreck-It Ralph* should recognise the playable Mega Drive preview of *Fix-It Felix Jr* as being the game the titular anti-hero stars in. The author's website at www.kikstart.eu/felix-megadrive calls this V0.01b but there's already quite a bit of actual game there. Hopefully the project will continue and the results will be comparable to Jim Bagley's coin-op version that was shown at Revival this year.



» [Amiga] Have axe will travel.

Straight outta' Asgard

Asgard Met Vikings dishes out a Viking to one or two players and challenges them to collect bottles of mead that are being dropped from Asgard by their head deity Odin. There are some grumpy looking goblins roaming around which need avoiding or slaying and the game is over when ten bottles are missed. The downloads of either a disk image or as files for hard disk are behind www.kikstart.eu/asgard-amiga.



» [Vectrex] Rolling, rolling, rolling.

The new kid

It only has three levels, but the preview of puzzle game *Bloxorz* for the Vectrex is pretty solid. The gameplay is simple enough; roll a box until it only covers the exit square and don't fall off the edges. www.kikstart.eu/bloxorz-vectrex heads to the author's website and, after the technical discussion, there's some video footage and a download. The preview was developed during the most recent Retrochallenge: www.retrochallenge.org.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

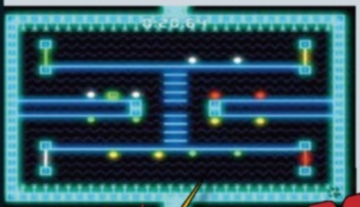
>> NOT WHEN DINER DASH GOES BAD

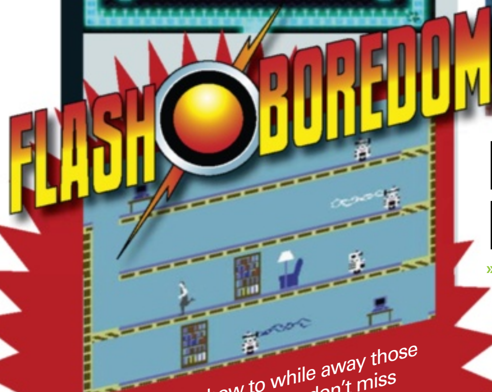
Demon Dash is an over-the-top, fixed-speed scrolling action game where all hell has literally broken loose and one woman plans to wrestle control back by running headlong into hordes of demons and spraying them with bullets. We've had a quick blast and, despite it being average cosmetically, there are some interesting moments during play including when our heroine ducks under a burning car as it flies past. The demo is available in the XBLIG shop with more information lurking menacingly behind www.kikstart.eu/demon-dash-xblig.



>> SUPERCHARGED SEQUEL

Gem Chaser 2 is, unsurprisingly, the sequel to the fun Xbox Live Indie game we looked at back in Issue 116; it isn't just a case of stuffing new levels into the existing engine either, the designers have added a more complex scoring system and extra elements for the levels to use. Bob Smith's Spectrum conversion is coming soon. www.kikstart.eu/gem-chaser-2-xblig.





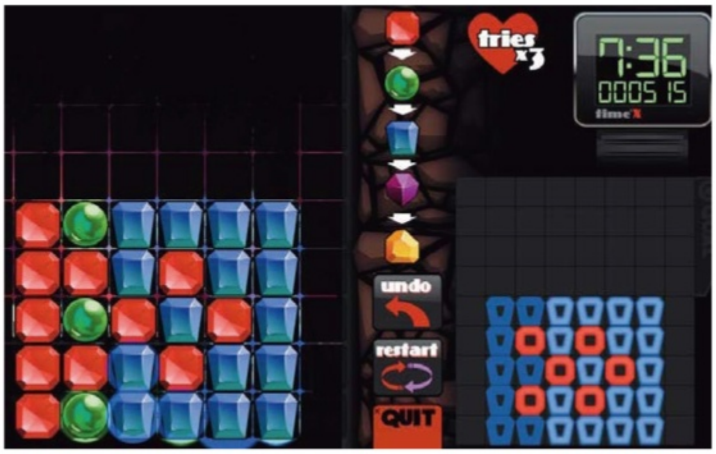
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Impossible Mission**.

STAY A WHILE, STAY FOREVER! HELP PREVENT EVIL GENIUS ELVIN ATOMBENDER FROM DESTROYING THE WORLD BY SEARCHING HIS STRONGHOLD FOR PARTS OF THE PASSWORD THAT UNLOCK THE BUNKER AT ITS HEART. THERE ARE JUST SIX HOURS ON THE CLOCK BEFORE DOOMSDAY AND AN ARMY OF LETHAL ROBOTS TO AVOID. WWW.KIKSTART.EU/IMP-MISSION-FLASH.

XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES WE'VE PLAYED. . .







GEMHEX

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/GEMHEX-WIN

***GemHEX* is a** puzzle game and described by its creator Jay Griffin as a tribute to the similarly-named Amiga title *Gem'X*. The objective is to modify the gems in the main play area to the left until they match the goal displayed on the right. Gems can be one of five colours – red, green, blue, purple or yellow – and clicking on one makes it skip forwards through the chain by two colours while the four above, below and either side change by just one. If a gem passes yellow it'll disappear, allowing any it was supporting to drop down.

As with all good puzzle games, it doesn't sound particularly complicated but, after the first couple of stages are out of the way, things become devious. And because this is a tribute rather than a direct remake, the level designs aren't just conversions of the ones in *Gem'X*, so fans of the original can enjoy working out the solutions too. The graphics, sound and presentation are all very good throughout and an editor has been included so more experienced players who breeze their way through the supplied levels can create some even trickier puzzles to challenge their friends with.



DARK STORM BLAST 360

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/DSB-XBLIG

Dark Storm Blast is a shoot-'em-up which bears a few similarities to Namco's *Assault*. The player takes control of a tank that is steered around an arena with each set of tracks controlled by a thumbstick. The tank will track sideways if both controls are held in the same direction or leap into the air when they're pushed away from each other.

The tank always remains facing the top of the screen however, with the entire play area being rotated around when it turns. Most players will need to acclimatise just a little to the slightly dizzying movement before getting down to the important business of blasting an assortment of ground and airborne enemies and collecting power-ups to do further damage.

REFLECTOR

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/REFLECTOR-XBLIG

At first glance the title logo, name and not entirely serious opening storyline are reminiscent of *Arkanoid*, but *Reflector* is a puzzle game. Balls of energy launched by cannons must be guided to receptors with reflective panels that can be placed in their path; there's a limited stock on each stage and, although reflectors can be recycled for different uses by rotating them, once positioned they can't be moved.

It doesn't take long before the easy levels are out of the way and elements that make things more difficult are added such as switch-operated doors. There aren't any time limits to worry about and if everything goes completely wrong the level can be restarted as often as needed, but actually puzzling out how to complete each stage is a challenge.



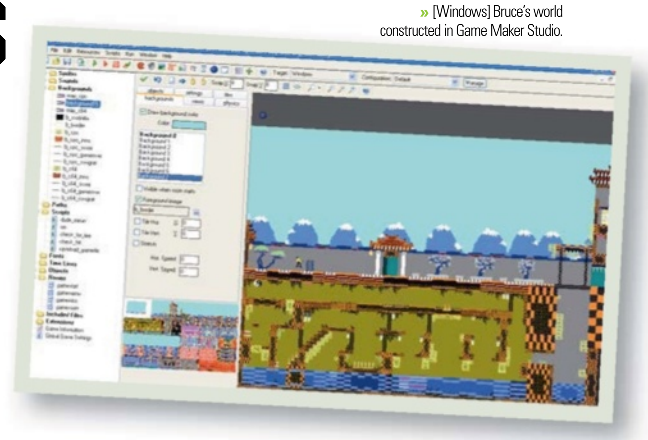




» [Windows] Come at me, bro.

HOMEBREW HEROES

BRUCE LEE II HAS PROVED VERY POPULAR AMONGST FANS OF THE ORIGINAL, SO WE GOT IN TOUCH WITH DEVELOPER BRUNO R MARCOS TO TALK ABOUT EXPANDING ON A WELL-LOVED 8-BIT EXPERIENCE AND DRAWING CHUCK NORRIS



» [Windows] Bruce's world constructed in Game Maker Studio.

Q&A

What was it about the original *Bruce Lee* game that drew you towards creating a sequel?
When I was a child I was an Amstrad CPC 464 owner and *Bruce Lee* was in my top five games of that time. It was that kind of game that you would play again and again, even if you had finished it a dozen times. I wanted to make a little platform game and that's when *Bruce Lee* crossed my mind. I made some sketches, enemies and a few playable levels and felt that they played as well as the original, so I thought to turn it into a complete game – not a remake but a sequel.

And what sort of response have you received from fans of the original game?
I tried to be faithful to the spirit of the original game. The CPC version was my main goal as it was the one I owned and I made the C64 version from there (I only played an emulated version a few times). I started to receive lots of positive and nostalgic feedback telling me that they loved the game and that it felt like a real sequel; this was very rewarding as it was my first intention.



Roughly how long did *Bruce Lee II* take to produce from start to finish?
The game is made using Game Maker Studio and it took me around three to four weeks to make.

Were there any memorable landmarks during the process of making *Bruce Lee II*?
I think when I first played the title screen and heard the *Bruce Lee* intro music; that was stirring. Creating the characters from the Bruce Lee movies like Chuck Norris or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was really fun, especially seeing them fight like the Green Yamo and Ninja in the original.

Has anybody approached you about converting *Bruce Lee II* to an 8-bit computer?
Yes, there is a forum with an initiative to port the game to a real C64 – I also sent them the sprite sheets for the matter – but don't know if they [are] still in the works. The thread can be seen at www.kikstart.eu/bruce-c64-thread.

And finally, can you tell us anything about what projects you're working on next?
Actually I'm improving *Arcade Game Studio* and have some drafts of a strategy game for touch devices, but nothing showable yet. I am planning to move back to the States due to family matters so I need to relocate my job first.



» [Windows] Can I get your autograph?



» [Windows] Is it a bird? No, it's a Bruce!

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EXPANDING RETRO

Dear Darran,
Have you considered expanding **Retro Gamer** magazine to contain other retro content? I love the Eighties and Nineties and it would make my day if my favourite magazine started covering other things from this period. How about a look at the best cartoons of the Eighties, classic board games like *Blood Bowl* and *Hero Quest* or a behind-the-scenes look at classics such as *Back To The Future* or *Quantum Leap*?

I'm not expecting you to take over the entire magazine with this content, but I can't be the only person who'd love to see every aspect of their youth celebrated in their favourite magazine.

David Crouch



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Grand Theft Auto V

Steve had Rockstar's game pre-ordered months ago and has been regaling Darran and Jon with tales of epic heists and naughty shenanigans. Darran's wishing he hadn't made a bet to never play it, as he really likes the look of *Grand Theft Auto Online*. Jon just wants to know when it's coming out on Mac.



It's a tricky one David. While we certainly like the idea of covering other aspects of retro, we're about retro games first and foremost. We used to run an A-Z of retro every issue when Retro Gamer first started. Lets just say we got to D and leave it at that.

GAMEPLAY PLEASE

Dear Retro Gamer,
Whilst I do love your magazine, I am getting more and more frustrated with your game articles. The issue I have is that your articles are focussing almost exclusively on the development of the games and not the games themselves.

Take Issue 118, which I just finished. Two of the big game articles on *Flashback* and *Defender Of The Crown* had almost nothing about how the games actually played. Almost all of the articles are talking with developers, which, for me, is far less interesting than reliving my past enjoyment of the games. Often the only way I get that is through looking at the screenshots.

What about going into depth about the different levels or even printing a map like we used to get in the old gaming mags? Take *Defender Of The Crown*. What about reliving the difficulty of keeping your mouse/lance

STAR LETTER

JUST MY IMAGINATION

Dear Retro Gamer,
Something struck me the other day as to why I hold old games in such esteem, and why the latest generation of games, despite their amazingly detailed 3D graphics, huge worlds and vast story lines, leave me cold. It isn't just the old-style joystick twitching that I miss, it is the fact that there was something else required of your brain to play those games – imagination.

With my first love, the Spectrum, imagination was very important. The box art already started those imaginary juices flowing as they had little resemblance to what you saw on screen. But they went hand-in-hand, and with the cover in front of you, that stick-man sprite became that grimacing barbarian. We built up worlds for those characters to inhabit when really there were only a few screens. We filled in their voices, drew maps and gave to those games a little of ourselves.

There were also text adventures of course, which were really like reading living books, your mind seeing imagery from what were merely words. Even when things became a bit more detailed with the 2D RPGs from the 16-bit era, they still pushed you to see a world that wasn't really there. To see it in 3D, to imagine the voices of those static, bearded shop keepers and to know, just know, what lay over those impassable mountains.

We are spoilt nowadays – we have it spelt out for us like a bad American movie. It is progress, I know, and it has to happen. Some of the latest games are truly awesome to behold, but I worry for the next generation, for without imagination, there are no new ideas.

Stephen Westwood (Rygarman)

You've summed up our own feelings perfectly Stephen. Imagination was a crucial element to gaming back in the day. Darran remembers playing *Deathchase* with his friend Paul Elkins and pretending they were on Speeder bikes, and we can't be the only people who imagined they were an adventurer as they were mapping out the likes of *Eye Of The Beholder*. Thanks for taking us back to our youth.



» [Spectrum] In Darran's mind he was always riding a Speeder bike. Did anyone else do this?



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your favourite RPG?

Kai
Final Fantasy VII and *Ultima VII* still are the cream of the crop for me. The former touched me in a way no other RPG could, the latter is brilliance in game design and immersion.

gman72
I put 100 or so hours into *Front Mission 3*. I'll never get that time back.

psj3809
Ultima IV – Very basic graphics but a huge world to explore
Baldur's Gate – Best RPG since the early *Ultima* games, again a huge world to explore, non-linear, side quests etc, stunning.

retrojc
Pokémon Yellow – My first real encounter with an RPG, and still my favourite.
Final Fantasy VIII – *VII* was good, yes, but *VIII* was great. That card game too, that had me hooked.
Fallout 3 – "I don't want to set the world on fire".

malczx
I used to like the budget game *Master Of Magic* from Mastertronic Added Dimension – I played it on my mate John's C64 back in the day and loved the spooky music. Fighting the skeletons and hellhounds was fun too. I bought the Spectrum version but it didn't give the same excitement somehow.

Megamixer
Final Fantasy VIII without question. It was more of an experience for me and not 'just a game'. That's not a feeling you get very often with videogames.

PaulEMoz
The Bard's Tale. I've been telling the same tale for years, but briefly: I bought the cassette version for my Commodore 64 for £2.99. I then spent 13 obsessive months playing it until I completed it. That was my first RPG and remains my favourite.

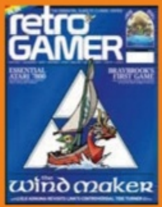
Macias
Lots and lots of great titles, if I had to name one game it would either be *Fallout 2* or *Morrowind*, with honourable mention of the only computer RPG I played in recent years – the brilliant roguelike *Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup*.

Scapegoat
Alternate Reality: The Dungeon on the A8. I must have put weeks into playing that game – never came close to finishing.

Spacepatrol
Suikoden II, I must play through it every year.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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» [C64] Chris wants to see more focus on how games like *Defender Of The Crown* play. Is he the only one? Write in and let us know.



on target or explaining those 'almost RPG elements' which you dangle in front of us in the article but don't explain?

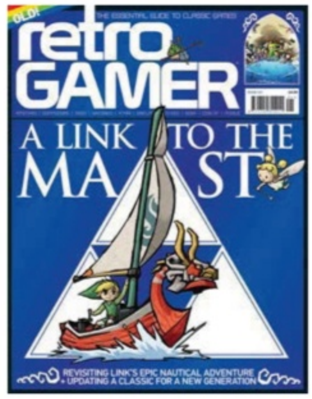
Cheers, Chris

Thanks for you letter Chris. Space is always at a premium in magazines, and if we've got the opportunity to interview someone about a game, we'd rather do that. After all, everyone typically knows how a game plays, so we'd rather concentrate on offering unique content that can rarely be found anywhere else. We'll certainly keep it in mind though.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

Darran discusses the covers that didn't quite make it





EIJI AONUMA COVER DESIGN

While Eiji Aonuma is a big name in the *Zelda* universe, he doesn't have quite the same reach as the likes of Shigeru Miyamoto. The bigger problem here however was that his name was just difficult to read, so we went for a different option.

ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER COVER

It's always tough trying to come up with interesting cover lines that will hopefully draw in readers. Luke Albigés came up with A Link To The Mast, which was not only a clever pun, but a reference to the classic SNES game. Ultimately, it was too messy.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

Dear **RG**,

Back in the day, we used to go to Dimov's house and play on his C64. There were usually around five of us, and the games we tended to play were the likes of *Decathlon* and *Combat School* – the intensely competitive variety where the strongest tended to prevail.

Two would battle it out while the other three would usually perform various wrestling moves on each other back on Dimov's bed, trying to 'submit' the opponent before their next turn was up. Dimov himself tended to win most of his C64 challenges, and this was most likely attributed to the fact that he would have a single dumbbell in his room. Strangely, he would only use it on the one, right arm, making it huge, and even years later I wonder if he specifically 'trained' that arm in order to win his weekly *Combat School* bouts. In fact, thinking back, I am quite sure of it – his joysticks were always a-glitter with chrome flakes and smelled strongly of sweat.

Luckily for us, Dimov was not any good at cricket, and he was popularly known as 'One-ball-Dimov' because that's precisely as long as he used to last.

Sam J Scuteri



» [PC] It's amazing to think that the *Elder Scrolls* series is nearly 20 years old now.

» [C64] We weren't as good as Dimov but we'd certainly give *Combat School* a good old waggle.



What an interesting tale Sam. While we never knew anyone quite as dedicated as Dimov, we did used to have regular competitions, also on *Combat School*. We guess it just brings out the competitiveness in people. You'd have a two-man team with one person waggling on the assault course, with a friend pressing the space bar to jump.

BACK TO SKYRIM

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Have you ever considered running a feature on *Elder Scrolls*? The original game, *Arena*, was released all the way back in 1994, making it ideal fodder for **Retro Gamer** magazine. It was a fantastic ground-breaking game back in its day and I remain a huge fan of the series. I'd love to read an article about how the franchise has evolved over the years, and as a gamer I could never imagine that a game like *Skyrim* would have been possible when I first played the original game.

Russell Tucker

We've had a few enquiries about the *Elder Scrolls* series, possibly due to the new compilation that's recently been released. We'll see if we can put something together to tie-in with next year's *The Elder Scrolls Online*.

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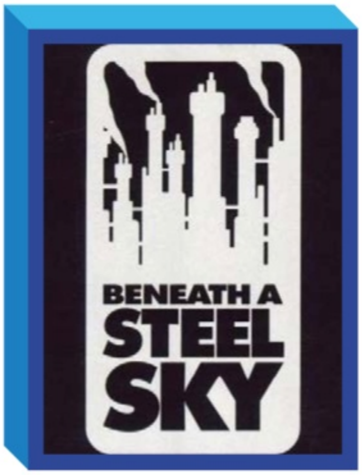

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ENDGAME



BENEATH A STEEL SKY

» Having survived a helicopter crash following a kidnapping by security soldiers sent from Union City by the powerful computer LINC, Robert Foster – so-called because a can of Foster's was found near the landing spot – partners up with a robot called Joey and tries to make some sense of what is going on. Not an easy task, that's for sure, as this ending proves



01

» Half machine, half man, the guy in the centre of this gooey looking room is none other than Robert Foster's ageing father becoming at one with LINC. It needs his brain in order to function but it knows Foster's father can't last much longer…



02

» So it wants to replace him with Foster. Foster's dad engineered the helicopter crash to prevent him from being LINC brain fodder. LINC then rejects his father, leaving the old man to die since he depends on the machine for life.



03

» But Foster has a strong heart. LINC killed his mother. His father babbles on, spilling all and revealing he actually wanted to be part of the machine. The cad! "Who is the monster? The computer or you?" Asks Foster.



04

» Meanwhile, Joey, who has converted into human form and is now called Ken, has replaced Foster's dad in the machine. Foster's dad dies and Mr Hobbins becomes Ken's gopher. Foster hands a wrench to Mr Hobbins, having nicked it from him earlier.



05

» And with that, Foster is gone; his work is done. He speeds away in a chopper across Union City. No doubt he'll be linking up with a few stiff drinks while he tries to work out the complex plot, before watching *The Matrix* for a bit of light relief instead.


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